DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 158 IR 010 181

AUTHOR O'Bryan, Kenneth G.
TITLE Writing for Instructional Television.
INSTITUTION Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-89776-052-2
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 157p.
AVAILABLE FROM Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1111 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036 ($5.00, prepaid).

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Television; Group Dynamics; *Instructional Design; *Production Techniques; *Programing (Broadcast); Public Television; *Scripts; Television Studios

ABSTRACT

Writing considerations specific to instructional television (ITV) situations are discussed in this handbook written for the beginner, but designed to be of use to anyone creating an ITV script. Advice included in the handbook is based on information obtained from ITV wirters, literature reviews, and the author's personal experience. The ITV writer's relationship to other members of a project team is discussed, as well as the role of each team member, including the project leader, instructional designer, academic consultant, researcher, producer/director, utilization person, and writer. Specific suggestions are then made for writing and working with the project team and additional production crew members. A chapter is devoted to such specific ITV writing conventions as script format, production grammar, camera terminology, and transitions between shots. Understanding production technology is the focus of a chapter which discusses lighting, sound, set design, and special effects. An in-depth look at choice of form--narrative, dramatic, documentary, magazine, or drama--is provided, followed by advice and guidelines for dealing with such factors as the target audience, budget and casting, treatment, visualization, and revisions. Ten additional readings are suggested. (LMM)

# WRITING for INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION

by

Kenneth G. O'Bryan



Educational Activities
Corporation for Public Broadcasting

ISBN 0-89776-052-2
First Printing January 1981
Published by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and distributed by the Public Telecommunications Press, National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) 1346 Connecticut Ave. N W. Washington, D.C. 20036.

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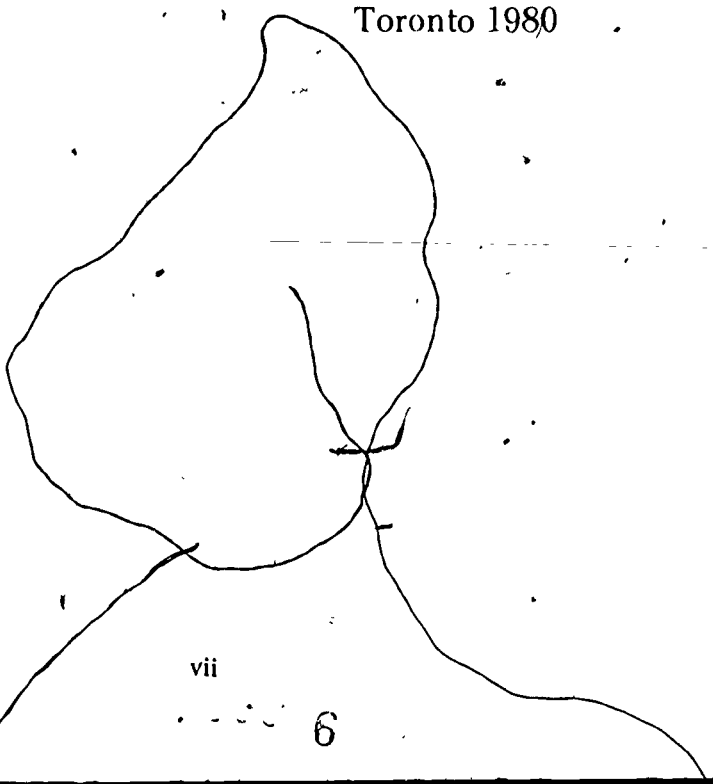
# Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment is gratefully made to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and to the professional writers of ITV who were contacted for this manual and who gave freely of their ideas and knowledge. Special thanks is due to author's associate, Ms. Donna Paulionis, for her contributions to the content and her assistance in completing the manual.

K.G.O'B.
Toronto 1980



*Chapter One*

# The Creation of the ITV Writers Manual

In the past decade, writing for instructional television (ITV) has become a specialty profession. A breed of full-time and freelance writers have turned from other media and general television (GTV) to work almost exclusively in ITV.

Most of these writers have had to make substantial changes in the way they practice their art in order to meet the unique demands of ITV, where the principal aim is to ensure the quality of a program's instructional content. To be fully effective, ITV writers have found it necessary to integrate the resources of many ITV educational and research spe-

cialists with the attention-getting, motivating aspects of television. In some cases their scripts equal or surpass GTV in their use of television as a medium and, at the same time, meet established instructional requirements. It is from discussions with such writers that the core of this manual has been written.

In addition to information obtained from leading writers in ITV, the author reviewed an extensive list of books and articles on writing for all forms of television. Ideas obtained from these sources were integrated with the author's experience in many facets of ITV as a researcher, writer, consultant, and producer. Consequently, this manual presents the author's personal approaches to ITV script writing.

The manual is based upon production methods that exist in most major ITV agencies as they enter the 1980s. It examines the contexts in which the script writer will function as a member of a project team and the nature of working relationships which will arise therein. It studies the basic elements of script writing and describes the grammar and syntax of scripting in relation to the production elements of setting, camera, lighting, sound, switching and direction. Finally, the manual offers suggestions on the choice of formats and invites the writer to consider the use of known technologies of research, in-

structional design, production techniques and advanced educational systems approaches to the writing of effective instructional scripts.

Effective writing for ITV is qualitatively different from writing for GTV and, therefore, demands a special understanding of education, research, and the media. It is not intended to be a set of guidelines for the writing of a specific script or number of scripts on a single theme. Rather, it is designed to be used as a basic manual for beginning and moderately experienced writers, both professional and occasional, in-house and freelance.

The manual is aimed primarily towards the less experienced writer and the newcomer to ITV scripting. As such, it contains some material which may be more basic than would be necessary for the skilled script writer. Experienced and highly skilled writers, however, may nonetheless find some value in the suggestions for more advanced scripting approaches which appear towards the end of the various chapters.

As we move into the 1980s, a new body of information is becoming available to ITV writers about how children watch television and how they learn. This new information, coupled with new technologies which will become available in the 1980s, can be expected to change the face of ITV. And the ITV writer can be in the vanguard of that change

through knowledge of the tools of the trade and of the role that can best be played.

In that spirit, this manual has been prepaired for those who will be writing for the decade of the 1980s and beyond. The decade itself will create new challenges by bringing the ITV writer into contact with advanced technologies demanding as-yet undeveloped techniques of ITV scripting.

As changes in ITV are anticipated, changes in schools, delivery systems, teaching techniques and even learning itself can also be expected. This manual is, therefore, written from the experiences of the 1970s and directed to the opportunities of the 1980s. It attempts to deal realistically with the pressure, the problems and the relationships that a writer entering ITV for the first time might encounter. In doing so, it is hoped the writer will learn to work effectively with ITV colleagues in order to exploit fully the true potential of the medium.

*Chapter Two*

# The ITV Writer and the Project Team

## There Is No "Captive" Audience

Even with the sternest disciplinarian in charge of a class with every student physically locked into place to view an ITV program, there is no guarantee a single pupil is actually paying attention to the goings-on presented. Minds are free to range, and eyes can easily watch, but not see, the television screen. There is no such thing as a captive audience.

Writers for instructional television must use their every skill and art to capture the interest as well as the physical presence of the learner if they are to succeed. Unfortunately, this axiom is all too often ignored or

neglected by ITV writers; thus their programs are often dull, lifeless, and unsuccessful.

It is also important that the ITV writer understand the role of television in the total learning process. Television is one tool available to the teacher, one resource available to the student, and therefore must compete with other resources within the context of the limited hours of a school day. However, it is one of the most powerful and persuasive tools available.

By nature, and as a result of the expectations created by a generation of viewers, modern television production demands that the target audience be interested, held, entertained, and promptly released from undue concentration. Although it is true that instructional television is primarily a part of the learning business, its medium is essentially show business. To neglect or fail to understand that expectation of the target audience is to lose an enormous instructional advantage.

In North American television, the physical attention span demanded of the viewer for uninterrupted action is rarely more than eight minutes at a stretch. Current programming styles are progressively shortening that demanded attention span, however, as production techniques and budgets allow more changes of scene and greater variety of locations.

In but very few instances, current television does not demand an intense, *active* participation of its viewers over a long period of time. This is especially the case in children's programming where movement, pace, and changing levels of interest and intensity have been the hallmarks of most of the successful ITV and GTV programs. The exceptions to this principle have benefited by being exceptions. They offer a contrast in pace and style to the norm, but even these few do not require the viewer to attend to a single subject area or static production style for a long period of time.

It is important to understand the differences between active and passive participation. There is plenty of evidence to show that almost all television viewers can sit in apparent concentration in front of a TV set for exceptionally long periods of time, but it is less certain how much active learning is actually taking place. This may not be particularly critical for the GTV writer, who needs only to attract and hold an audience through successive commercial breaks. It is, however, devastating to the ITV writer, who must not only hold the audience's attention, but simultaneously convey, have understood, and cause to be retained, learning which is often complex, difficult, and non-motivating.

As a result, the ITV writer is in a much more complex position than is the GTV

specialist. Constrained by the demands of the program's instructional design group and the restrictions of the educational system, the ITV writer takes his or her low-budget production into almost direct competition with everybody's view of what television should be.

It is not surprising, then, that only a relatively few good writers work full time in ITV. The financial rewards are often conspicuously lower than in the "real" world of GTV. The constraints and restraints are infinitely more difficult to work under than in the more explicit field of GTV writing where the only recognized "bottom line" is the ratings. While the competition there is tougher, at least expectations are clear and success can be substantial.

The best writing for ITV is usually done by a few professionals working on a limited number of productions, but the bread-and-butter programming seems to be written by good educators with a flair for words who understand only minimally television production techniques and who have almost no training in writing the visuals side of the television script. In fact, almost everyone associated with ITV gets into the script writing business. Instructional designers write; formative researchers write; educational project leaders rewrite; directors rewrite; and, occasionally, even administrators write. In short,

many talented people are writing for ITV, but few are professional writers.

Freelancers with time left over from commercial work are sometimes hired to script the bigger budget ITV shows. This can produce a program achieving positive target audience reactions but negative (sometimes disastrous) results for the educational content. It may also produce an increase in resistance to the use of ITV by educational agencies and teachers.

Some production houses have full-time writers on staff. Large agencies may have a stable of writers, but this is relatively rare and, in most cases, few of the writers in the stable have set out to be *specialists* in ITV script writing.

In summary, there are a few fine professionals and many talented, but underdeveloped, amateurs writing for ITV. Regrettably, the resulting standard of writing is (with a few notable exceptions) relatively low, as reflected in the number of unsuccessful programs that succeed in turning audiences off, rather than on to ITV.

An axiom that applies to the whole range of television production holds that a poor show can always be made from a good script, but a good show is rarely produced from a poor one. Writing is extremely important to successful production, and yet, ITV writing is often seen as no more than stringing to-

gether facts in a clear, educationally acceptable manner. Programming with that view in mind, however, fails to use the dynamic visual characteristics of the medium, and instead presents its content as though television were a superior form of radio, an inferior form of print, or an unwieldy substitute for the filmstrip projector.

Instructional television must, therefore, be treated as a specialty medium with its own principles, procedures, and styles. Many of its needs and the means necessary to meet them may be found in the environment in which ITV is produced and within which the writer must function.

## The ITV Writer's Environment

ITV writers work in a special environment born of the mix of television, education and research. Unlike their GTV counterparts, ITV scripters are accountable in the course of production to an array of educational specialists. Therefore, most major producers of ITV re-employ the project team approach to creation, execution, and completion of a program or series. The project team's actual composition varies from agency to agency, but a typical team will include the following members: project leader, instructional designer, academic, psychological or educational consultant, researcher, producer/director, utilization person and writer. The ITV

writer must learn to function as part of that team, sometimes as its leader, but more often simply as one member working with each specialist in the course of the production process.

In a few instances, the commercial approach is used whereby the writer and director are free to write, design, and execute their production unassisted and unhampered by educators. This, however, has become increasingly rare as ITV dollars are more closely pegged to public demands for accountability. Consequently, this manual focuses on the more common case of the production house with a full complement of professional educators, drawn from universities and school systems, who work with the writer and director to collectively produce the program.

### *The Project Leader*

The project leader, drawn from almost any internal specialty area, functions in much the same way as does an executive producer in general television, as a coordinator responsible for scheduling, policy setting, budgeting, and general management of the project from conception to delivery.

In agencies with a strong educational orientation, the project leader is often found in the instructional staff rather than in production personnel. In other agencies, the

producer/director occupies the role. It is quite rare for the writer to lead the team except in special cases where an agency's head writer is involved. Usually, the project leader occupies at least one other specialized role in the project team, but the primary task is coordination of the team's work and sequential approval of each stage of the project. Consequently, the writer sooner or later will have to convince the project leader that the script meets the requirements of the team.

*The Instructional Designer*

The Instructional Designer (ID) is a project team member whose influence on the style, content, and execution of instructional television has increased enormously in recent years. "Instructional Design" as a theoretical approach to program construction is offered as a graduate degree program at the doctoral level in several universities, and specialists are appearing in the field in increasing numbers. They can sometimes overwhelm a project by insisting upon more content than the format can carry, but are nevertheless essential to the project's success.

The ID's tasks in the project team are to develop the writer's guide for the program and to create a complete instructional design for broadcast and non-broadcast materials. The job will involve determining the educa-

tional material to be included in the program, the format of the teacher's guide, and the nature of the student's print materials. It will often include the development of an instructional style for the ITV program. Consequently, the writer will be required to create a script whose style matches the design the ID establishes for the program. In some agencies, in fact, instructional design has become so embracing that the program becomes only a part of a "learning system," in which the television program itself, and therefore the script, may actually be secondary or supportive to a larger educational program. Learning to work with, rather than for, the instructional designer is critical to a successful ITV writer.

### *The Academic, Psychological or Educational Consultant*

Almost every project team includes at least one consultant drawn from community, regional, or national professionals in the specialty area.

The role of the consultant is at least threefold. He or she is the team's academic security blanket who represents the expert advice necessary to defend the project's accuracy in instructional content, especially in controversial areas. The consultant's prestige and knowledge is particularly useful when dealing with official or governmental groups.

A source person in the typical or curriculum area of the project, the academic or professional consultant can be of real value to both the instructional developer and the writer. A knowledgeable, consistent, and interested consultant is a prized asset to a project team.

The consultant's third role is that of in-house content critic. Good consultants are usually difficult to satisfy in first drafts, adamant in their demands for accuracy in second drafts, and careful in their reading of final drafts. Poor consultants are those who are too easily satisfied, and very poor consultants get cold feet and decline to approve programs shortly before air date!

*The Researcher*

Researchers come in at least two distinct types. Program researchers are information diggers and of immediate value to the writer. They can supply the incidental, varietal material and data that can give life, vigor and interest to a script.

Not to be confused with the instructional designer, who is primarily concerned with the educational content and style, a good program researcher will provide facts and information within and beyond the topic and will validate the accuracy of the dialogue, narrative, set, historical scene, or whatever else the writer may invent or need.

The second type of researcher has a very

different task and often finds himself or herself involved in some conflict with other members of the team at least once in the project. This is the formative researcher, whose job is to test each or all of the stages of the project on target audience subjects as the program develops. This can involve testing treatments, scripts, segments or pilot projects, as well as non-broadcast and other support materials.

Characteristically, the formative researcher finds more problems than solutions and is distressingly skillful at producing evidence to support findings. Some researchers believe their data implicitly and insist on changes being made to reflect their results. Others, usually those more experienced in production realities, are more cautious and tend to suggest possibilities rather than absolutes. The latter type (from the writer's viewpoint) is more frustrating since he or she offers few real "solutions." In the long run, however, that researcher may be more valuable to the team, since unnecessary and precipitate changes will be avoided while possible alternatives are provided.

New writers are sometimes overwhelmed by researchers' pronouncements and change scripts unnecessarily or unadvisably. The good, experienced writer knows, however, that all results provided by the researcher should be carefully weighed and explanations

in plain language should be requested. In the end, the writer must back his or her own judgment or ask the researcher to share scripting credit.

### *The Producer/Director*

The producer's role in general television is akin to omnipotence, but such is not necessarily the case in ITV. If the producer is also the director, then he or she will surely have a strong influence on the program.

In some agencies, particularly large, well-funded organizations, the producer's role is that of project leader and coordinator, distinct from that of director. In such cases the director will be a different person charged with actual audio-visual production of the program. The roles are described as separate entities here, but their functions can, of course, be combined as one person's activity wherein their impact on the project increases substantially.

*The producer* oversees every aspect of the project and functions in the role described earlier for the project leader. In addition, the producer must develop an overview, or professional "feel" for the ultimate product. Often, the producer is a prior director who has moved on from calling the shots to a more managerial role, and will usually continue to have a close interest in the technical aspects of the production. Sometimes the producer

will show much greater sympathy for a director's viewpoint than for that of a writer, given a greater professional interest in the technical quality of a production than in the extent of its instructional impact or in the problems of its writer.

*The director* is charged with control of the actual production and many a writer in every form of audio-visual production has been amazed at what directors can do with and to scripts. Good directors are technically proficient people who work well with lighting technicians, switchers, sound persons, floor managers, and cameramen. Very good directors have similar abilities but add the facility to work with the on-camera talent. They are also effective in their work with videotape editors. Excellent directors possess all these qualities and one other—they have understood completely the writer's script and its inherent intent. Such directors are very rare, and most often the writer will find his directors to be in the good to very good category.

The establishment of a positive working relationship between writer and director is a key to producing a fine program. On occasion, however, conflicts of viewpoint will occur, some of which can be useful in clarifying intentions and creating new approaches. Adoption of an antagonist-protagonist stance, however, is rarely constructive.

### *The Utilization Person*

More than ever before, accountability is key to the work of agency managers. Many have turned to the utilization staff to ensure that ITV programs are at least used. Consequently, utilization persons appear as project team members at the earliest stages of production design. Their presence can have a marked effect upon the writer's product. One example of their influence is seen in the current trend toward shorter program lengths resulting from information supplied by utilization specialists who report that teachers need more class time to explore the openings made in the topic area.

The utilization person often indicates the changing nature of the various target audiences, describes the expectations of the gatekeepers through whom the program must pass, and sets the general ranges for program budgets by providing data on probable use of the program or series.

As they begin to recognize and exploit the strength of their position in the overall scheme of instructional television, utilization specialists will likely attain even more significance in the project team, and thereby more directly affect the ranges and styles within which the writer must create the script.

### *The Writer*

It is an old adage in the television industry that the key to a good program is a fine script, yet instructional television has drawn relatively few good writers. Given the lack of "hits," low budgets, and lack of glamour, it is not surprising that talented and successful ITV writers move to the more lucrative field of commercial programming once they get the necessary break.

All of this points to the fact that quality writers are *not* drawn to ITV for any of the usual reasons associated with job selection. As a result, many writers of ITV come from agency staffs, from educators who turn to crafting scripts, from freelancers between jobs, and from almost any credible person who can convince an agency to embark upon an instructional television project.

As a consequence, writers, despite their critical importance to project success, are often low on the project totem pole. Sometimes, as is the case with many freelancers, they are irregular members of the team or interact with but one or two of its members. It is understandable, therefore, that writing sometimes becomes subordinate to the needs of the instructional designer, the content consultant, the formative researcher, and the producer/director.

Given the quality of writers available to ITV, such a hierarchy is felt by some to be desirable, but it is the premise of this manual that the subordinate role of the writer is a major cause of low creativity and enterprise in ITV production.

The writer should be a key person on the production project team from topic conception through final acceptance of the shooting script. Thereafter the writer should continue as an integral member of the team.

*Chapter Three*

# Writing and Working With the Project Team

A major part of a later section of this manual deals with script writing techniques as they apply to the special problems of ITV. But before these relatively less complex aspects are discussed, the more difficult task of working effectively with the project team must be examined.

## The Writer and the Project Leader

Earlier, a distinction was drawn between the project leader as the head of the team and other possible roles.

When dealing with the project leader the writer should provide information on the

progress and nature of the scripting and should ensure that the leader understands the script thoroughly. A project leader who has not grasped the writer's intentions may allow changes and substitutions to be made that alter the script intent and thereby cause loss of plot and presentation control. By contrast, a project leader who is kept well-informed by the writer and who has grasped the writer's intent will be much less prone to accept or require unwarranted changes.

The project leader can also be a valuable source of information on needs and working styles of other team members which the writer can use to develop a feel for their objectives as seen by the leader. When skillfully done, this can provide the writer with valuable insights into the leader's perception of the project tasks enabling the writer to better evaluate the contribution each is expected to make to the scripting and, ultimately, to program production.

The project leader is the arbiter of budgeting for the production. Ultimately the writer must create a script that can be produced for the allotted dollars or convince the project leader to find more financing. A script that is unusable due to cost can have a devastating effect upon the morale of the team and is sometimes the reason for abandoning worthwhile programs. The responsibility rests with the writer to gain from the project leader an

accurate understanding of the financial, time, and other constraints under which he will be required to write.

## The Writer and the Instructional Designer

If an ITV program is to attain its full potential for success, the working relationship between instructional designer and writer *must* be sound. In some agencies the relationship is smooth and productive, in others it has led to near disaster, but there is almost always some conflict if both the instructional developer and writer are professional and honest.

Conflict usually arises because ITV utilizes television as an instructional tool when it is a medium that has gained its mass appeal by being entertaining. While ITV is not exclusively a classroom phenomenon, its target audiences remain most familiar with television as entertainment and with school as a purposeful environment where entertainment is secondary to instruction. A significant number of ITV writers probably agree with that view, but instructional designers are necessarily committed to the instructional model. Hence, some conflict is natural and certain to be both helpful and counterproductive in turn. To take advantage of the instructional designer's skills, the writer should keep in mind, when taking advice, that the ID is concerned with constructing the program to con-

vey the necessary educational material. Unless the instructional objectives are achieved, the program fails and the agency's investment is wasted, no matter how well the target audience liked the production.

Instructional designers are not script writers, just as script writers are not instructional designers. Both should be careful to tread lightly on the other's territory and commit themselves to constructive cooperation rather than to unhealthy antagonism and interference.

Some instructional designers may have an over-ambitious concept of the amount of instructional content that a program can carry or that the writer can internalize and recreate as a shooting script. Others produce writer's guides that contain a theoretical jargon, as well as instructional development packages two to three times longer than the shooting script. Such instructional designers can present a major problem for the writer. Often, the only adequate way to write to their specifications is to use an illustrated narrative technique and substantially increase the length of allotted program time.

The writer should remember that relatively few key concepts, perhaps only three or four, can be handled by the average target audience in a 15-minute program. Even 30-minute programs cannot afford to burden the medium with an overload of information,

especially when the target audience is in the elementary grades. Practical experience as well as summative research results indicate that a clear presentation of a few key ideas backed by substantial repetition is much more successful than continuing development of many new ideas in individual programs. Therefore, the writer should be wary of overly ambitious instructional designers who seek to include more than the program can bear, and be ready to defend their scripts against such obesity.

The writer should also attempt to ensure that the integrity of the program and its informational content are integral to each other. How this can be managed is described later in this manual, but it is primarily dependent upon the development of an effective relationship between the writer and the instructional designer.

### The Writer and the Program Researcher

The intelligent ITV writer will make extensive use of the program researcher, who can be a most valuable resource. Although many writers prefer to do their own legwork in the early stages of treatment preparation, the program researcher can offer an effective way to collect information needed for both the entertainment and instructional aspects of the script.

The writer and researcher should work as

a close-knit pair, the one creating the program from the information and source data provided by the other. At times, the producer/director, instructional designer and/or project leader will join the pair, but this will occur on a progressively less frequent basis as the project develops. When the final script has been approved and production commences, the researcher will shift to collaboration in order to work more closely with the director.

Quite often, the project team does not include a program researcher. Only the bigger agencies, or very well-established script writers, regularly employ full-time program researchers. Smaller agencies rely on freelancers or the academic or professional consultant for the necessary research skills.

Whether researcher or consultant, it should be noted that program researchers are often willing to undertake long searches for specified materials. Sometimes, however, they are badly directed when they undertake projects, and pursue information that is neither necessary nor useful. Such instances waste time and effort and destroy the researcher's interest and initiative. The writer should meet with the researcher as early as possible in the treatment phase so that both have a clear idea of the type of information sought and expected. This first meeting might also include the instructional designer who is also

likely to utilize the researcher for instructional content information. Coordination of effort is essential at this time, since much of the data to be researched will be used by other members of the project team.

A good researcher will have many ideas regarding the most useful sources and the reliability of information, and his suggestions should be carefully considered. All too often, the program researcher is treated as a lackey rather than as a colleague in the enterprise. When this occurs, it is not surprising that the researcher loses enthusiasm and delivers less than might otherwise be the case.

Writer and researcher should work together to discover and refine information to be used in the script. Of particular importance are details of the program production in terms of dress, setting, music, manners, etc. This point is accepted by most project teams when historical productions are in progress, but is too often forgotten in contemporary programs.

It usually takes at least nine months from conception of a project to production start-up, with dates as far away as two years. Difficult as it may be, a writer should ask the researcher to predict potential fashion trends, speech or personal style, or to find classical dress patterns so that the finished program will not look dated on its first broadcast play.

There is also the task of selecting effective,

appropriate music that will not quickly reveal the age of the program. A sharp researcher can spot modern groups on their way up, with music that promises to be at its best when the program airs but whose current cost remains within budget constraints at time of production. Although these aspects of production are also the director's concern, they play a significant part in the writer's visualization of scenes, characters, and plots.

Almost all ITV is designed for use over several years and all will eventually be dated by changing fashions and style, not only of dress and habit but also of dialogue, music, and production technique. Skillful use of the researcher as a futurist can delay the dating of both contemporary and historical programs and thus lengthen the profitable use of the productions themselves.

## The Writer and the Formative Researcher

A delicate but most rewarding relationship can exist between the writer and the formative researcher.

Formative research in instructional television is an almost automatic requirement in most requests for proposals issued by government agencies. Likewise, the formative research process is an integral part of the work of many major agencies, and specialist researchers increasingly appear on the project team. When the interaction between writer

and researcher works well, the project will reflect it, but sometimes hostility can develop between the artist and the scientist which is both disruptive and counterproductive.

Understanding formative research and its value to the project is a growing necessity for the ITV writer. The formative researcher is essentially a specialist consultant who designs and carries out tests of the writer's work on the target audience and their gatekeepers. Most such researchers are data-oriented and tend to ignore arguments founded on principles of artistic creativity if not corroborated by the data. The researcher and staff data-gatherers are sometimes adamant about their findings and may tend to demand rather than suggest changes even though, when pressed, they will admit that their data reflect only the probabilities of success or failure of a given treatment, never certainties. The formative researcher must always be assumed to be as liable to error as anyone else, and the data provided should be viewed with as much skepticism as would other sources of information.

A very good formative researcher is an exceptionally valuable resource person who can test, at relatively low cost, almost any aspect of pre-production activity; try out treatment ideas on target audiences or gatekeepers, report levels of interest; and suggest possible avenues of development and change. First-

draft scripts can be story-boarded and tested with a voice-over or with actual cast members in recorded dialogue. Almost all aspects of the set design, language level, educational acceptability, and appropriateness of design can be examined and the reactions of key respondents reported.

Given sufficient time, a writer can learn from the researcher which segment formats work best. In series production, the formative researcher is capable of testing one or more of the pilot programs for possible changes in the series proper and is an invaluable aid to the writer and the project.

In order to work effectively with the formative researcher the ITV writer might ask for the preparation of a background paper on the characteristics (educational, psychological, and developmental) of the target audience as they apply to the current project. This paper will usually be drawn from theoretical literature and/or interviews with classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, utilization specialists and others and should not present any great difficulty or time-cost to the formative researcher.

The writer should also request a description of the characteristic behavior of the gatekeeper group in projects of the proposed type. Collaboration with utilization personnel is also useful during the preparation of this background data. The objective is to gain in-

sight into the target group's chances of being shown the programs and to provide an assessment of how they may be written to ensure gatekeeper acceptance and favorable broadcast and utilization conditions.

Developing with the formative researcher and the instructional designer key questions that might be asked of the target groups concerning the topic area should be another of the writer's responsibilities. Such questions will form the basis for examining the main concepts of the program. Pretesting them with a target audience sample prior to developing a first treatment is very useful, since the treatment development phase serves to pre-condition much of the subsequent progress of the project.

Once a treatment has been devised and discussed by the project team, the writer should have the formative researcher examine puzzling aspects of the approach.

The formative researcher should also thoroughly test the storyboard for content, theme, characterization, and acceptability. The writer should work with the researcher to design the measurement and response instruments and try to accompany the testers during data collection. It is sometimes masochistic for the writer, but it does provide many firsthand insights worth considering. The writer need not participate actively in the data collection, but should closely observe the proce-

dures used and the reactions obtained and pay particular heed to the non-verbal responses of the target audience (e.g., attention, distraction, questions, etc.).

The writer should also try to convince the project leader and the producer/director to create test segments of the on-camera talent in the proposed formats. These can be used for testing on the target groups by showing the segments to different components of the target audience at the regular viewing site and in the laboratory under controlled conditions.

Writers should encourage the formative researcher to study the adequacy of the instructional design and, particularly, the acceptability of any theories of instruction it embodies. This is especially important when dealing with the gatekeeper group and with key educational administrators who may be program buyers. It is essential to be sure they are not antagonistic to the project's content and theoretical basis. No matter how well written or how well produced a program is, the gatekeepers must use it for the target audience to see it.

## The Writer and the Utilization Person

At first glance, utilization seems far removed from writing, since most utilization is seen to take place after program completion. In point of fact, writers and utilization persons rarely meet during development of a

project, but this is both wasteful and counter-productive to the project since the two have much to contribute to one another and to the success of the program.

Working closely with the utilization person will give an astute writer a number of valuable insights into what would be, in GTV, product marketing. An experienced, insightful utilization person can bring many types of information to a writer that can be invaluable in creating themes, metaphors, formats, and characterization.

Specifically, the utilization person can provide information on current utilization patterns in the system. This can include data on user preference for certain program formats (*e.g.*, dramas, documentaries, etc.), optimal program length and any length standardization requirements, and the need or demand for various kinds of support materials. It can also include data on key criticisms of previous offerings in the current project area, the nature of current program competition, and valuable gatekeeper information such as the educational importance of the project as perceived by target users, the breakdown of those most amenable and those least enthusiastic, any specific negative opinions of key administrators or potential buyers, and information on how this can be handled.

Information on the promotional and sup-



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port procedures planned for the completed project can also be provided. Here the writer and the utilization specialist can profit from each other's expertise by matching the creation of the program to its promotional and utilization packaging. Key characters or themes can be integrated into the utilization strategy and the associated non-broadcast materials written with a clear understanding of their potential use in the field. Thus the writer can be a very important source of information to the utilization person as well.

It is a regrettable fact that a great many programs and ITV projects are conceived, written, produced, and broadcast with little or no regard to their subsequent utilization. Very often, the script writer is held responsible for the shortcomings when, in fact, the problem occurred as a direct result of inadequate planning for utilization from the beginning. It is a wise, and probably successful, ITV writer who establishes an early and close working liaison with utilization.

## The Writer, the Director and the Studio Team

It will come as no surprise to most professionals in ITV that the writer's contacts are often confined to the project leader, the instructional designer, the researchers and, on rare occasions, the utilization person.

Typically, the writer, especially the free-

lancer, submits the initial script, rewrites to the team's directions, and leaves the scene upon acceptance of the shooting script. Indeed, some projects are deliberately planned to separate writing and production on the assumption that the writer has little or no place in actual direction and execution of the script. The underlying premise of such planning holds that writers are rarely able to exercise the professional detachment necessary to cut fat from scripts and to change dialogue unwieldy before the camera. Consequently, many directors are loathe to allow writers to influence production, and some go to considerable lengths to keep writers away from the sets.

More enlightened directors welcome the suggestions of the writer at every stage of the project and are interested in the writer's ideas on all aspects of production, including casting, talent direction, set design, lighting, mixing, and editing. Such directors are able to evaluate the writer's views and suggestions, discarding or using them to produce the program more effectively.

Ideally, the writer is part of the full production team and should be able to influence decisions at every stage of program development. In the best of all possible worlds, the writer's liaison with the production crew starts at the treatment stage. The skills of each member of the crew should always be

considered in the writing, especially when particular scenes demand special expertise in production techniques. The integrity of the script is always much more important than is, for example, the opportunity to use the expertise of an outstanding lighting technician, although knowledge of such strengths can be extremely valuable in expanding the scope of the program. While care is necessary to avoid "writing to strength," the availability of an outstanding lighting technician should not be excluded from consideration. It may offer an opportunity to emphasize special properties of the subject matter, or to create an exceptional atmosphere for the delivery of the content.

The fortunate writer is one who can gain a detailed knowledge of production unit capabilities and exploit those talents in the creation of the script. Each crew member in an average size agency is usually a specialist, and the writer should take note of the special characteristics of the director and the studio team.

## The Director

Directors seem to fall into three main types. Type one is a generally incompetent, lazy director who appears on the set only to click his or her fingers for camera changes as the switcher and the crew actually carry out the production. Fortunately, this is a rare

breed. Poorly organized, this type of director can be most frustrating to work with, since the overall quality of the production is farthest from his or her priority list. Ease and speed of completion with as little effort as possible is paramount. Not much can be done with this director since most efforts made by the writer, or for that matter any of the project team aimed at improving quality, will be turned aside, often with platitudes mixed with bland indifference. When avoidance of this type is impossible, the committed writer will bypass the bottleneck and work with other members of the crew, notably the switcher, the floor manager and the lighting and camera people.

The kind of director most likely to be found in the ITV station is the type two director. This person is often young and enthusiastic, and though somewhat inexperienced, is always an honest professional. Sometimes this type is an older stager, finishing out a journeyman's career in television production but still anxious to do a technically competent and educationally sound job.

Characteristically, directors of the second type are much more interested in the technical aspects of a production than in its dramatic or educational content. They are very demanding of good standard lighting, accurate camera work, a reasonable shooting ratio, a within-budget production and the

avoidance of expensive overtime and reshooting. They are less enthusiastic for the creation of special effects, or for the development of absolute dramatic accuracy. They are rarely concerned for a writer's need to know that the spirit and feel of a script has been captured as well as its dialogue and visual directions.

Type two directors tend to regard an acceptable "take" as any scene shot without an undue number of technical flaws, and a very good "take" as one in which there are no such flaws. In doing so, such directors may overlook the script's intentions and such cases usually suggest an uncertain or nonexistent relationship between writer and director. It may also reflect a lack of clarity or detail in the script.

Some commentators on the writer/director interaction have identified a distressing subgroup of the technically oriented director type. This director is, regrettably, present (but fortunately in small numbers) in the majority of ITV agencies. This type may be earnest and well-meaning, but consistently replaces the writer's fresh inventiveness with the oldest production cliches available. Almost inevitably, this director likes to do the job the "tried and true way," often full of old but honest suggestions, that consistently frustrate the writer's attempts to offer new perspectives or to create different opportunities for inter-

esting camera or lighting effects. Arguing that the audience will be confused, won't know what to expect, and does not need the effect anyway, this director can produce a stifling effect on writer creativity, especially that of younger, less experienced people. To counteract this approach to the production, the writer should appear regularly on the set and in the control room and learn the art of saying no, both diplomatically and emphatically. If the situation demands it, the writer must be prepared to appeal to the project leader to ensure that the script is properly produced as written and approved by the project team.

The third, and most welcome type of director, is unfortunately not often found in ITV production. Because the financial and, perhaps, the artistic rewards are greater in the world of GTV, the talented director who consistently improves upon the writer's intentions and develops a program that goes beyond the script's apparent potential, does not stay long in ITV work. There are, of course, exceptions, and as ITV grows in stature, more of these directors may be persuaded to stay.

Even with type three directors, the writer who is lucky enough to encounter the phenomenon will still have some problems. These problems arise mainly from the fact that the director will want to implement ideas that are often better than those the writer created,

thus causing ego difficulties. One way to overcome such conflict is to discuss the new ideas with the director and collaborate in incorporating them into the shooting script.

It should be noted that even the most talented directors can be wrong, and the writer must firmly argue the case should there be honest disagreement. Sometimes this can lead to fierce but valuable debate on all sides from which almost everyone can benefit.

In truth, very few professionals in the television industry have much respect for a writer who will not fight for the script as written when he or she believes the point to be important. Intelligent and experienced writers will avoid haggling over trivialities, but will be close to immovable if the heart and the soul of their scripts are threatened. Eventually, of course, it will be the project leader's responsibility to settle the inevitable disputes that are part of any truly creative television production, whether ITV or GTV.

Given the three main types of director and their many variations occurring in the ITV production agency, the writer should get to know the director as early as possible in the project's development. If a comfortable relationship is established the two should meet outside the project meetings to run over treatment ideas and ensure that they are viable before committing them to formal discussion

with the project team. Few things in a writer's day are more frustrating to hear than a respected director declaring with an air of finality that a treatment can't be done within the budget, under the time constraints or with the existing facilities available in the agency.

The writer should also assume, but not unquestioningly believe, that the director is interested in bringing about a fine quality production that fairly represents the script. Sometimes the writer's view of what that representation means may be different from that of the director.

The director's preparations, the instructions he or she gives to the crew, and, particularly, his handling of rehearsals and initial takes, are also of concern to the writer. Assessing the director's style, evaluating the levels of creativity, industry, technical competence and threshold of acceptability is also an important piece of observation for the writer.

If the director has a track record in the agency or elsewhere, the writer should find out about it. What is his or her favored style? Which techniques and what type of programs have been most effectively produced? Which have been less successful? What is the reputation of the director in the agency? Is the reputation of the director fairly earned and accurate or does it reflect agency politics? If possible, the writer needs to try to view the

director's previous productions and make an assessment of strengths and weaknesses, always bearing in mind the usual restrictions imposed on directors by available formats, talent, equipment and technical personnel.

The writer needs also to be a regular visitor to the director's studio—not to intrude and offer unsolicited advice—but only try to be present as the director works on other writers' scripts. Developing a feel for the director's style in order to adapt the script to take advantage of that style is also a useful endeavor.

The writer needn't be afraid to ask questions of the director, both technical and creative, on what has been observed. A writer should avoid, however, making criticisms or suggestions for improved studio technique. Many, but not all, directors like to talk about their work; judicious encouragement of the trait will help a sensitive writer know his or her closest collaborator.

The writer should try to have the director accept his or her presence in the actual production process of the script from casting through rehearsal to production. Many writers like to forget the script once it has been accepted and try to get into the next assignment as soon as possible. This attitude displays a fine confidence in the ability of the director and the crew to create the program, but can leave the writer astonished at what eventually happens to the script.

Once the script is handed over to the director, the writer must remember that responsibility goes with it. Few directors will tolerate an interfering writer and some will never allow a writer to get in their way. Almost all, however, will appreciate a helpful writer, especially one who is immediately available to do cosmetic work on awkward phrases in dialogue or narration, or who can advise the talent director on exactly how a particular emphasis or inflection was intended to be made. A fine and very delicate line exists between interference and assistance. The writer who can perceive its dimensions and stay on the helpful side of the line is one who will assist a director to draw the best from the script.

## The Talent Director

The talent director is a key figure in productions involving dramatic dialogue, but not in talk shows or narrated programs. There are relatively few skilled talent directors in ITV and in many agencies the director, or the floor manager, doubles as talent director.

Occasionally, especially in small agencies, the drama coach from a nearby college or university is brought in to act as talent director for scripted productions involving dramatic dialogue. This can be a major mistake on the part of the project leader, and a source of real problems to the ITV writer. The



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problems usually occur because the drama coach is seldom tuned in to the special requirements of television, a more intimate and flexible medium than the stage.

Too many well-scripted ITV productions have a distressingly "amateur" feel to them. Usually this is attributed to the lack of local talent or chronically low budgets that cause directors to hire second-rate talent. Quite often, however, the low level of professional "feel" can be traced to the techniques of the drama school talent director who tries to apply stage principles to TV production.

Poor talent direction can often be recognized in the over-pitched, sonorous tones of actors projecting their voices. Projection is totally unnecessary in television and is highly disturbing to a viewer, as it renders a program "stagey" and false. Politicians, many of whom are expert in public speaking to large audiences, produce the same unreal effect when they make televised speeches. The ambiance in television is very different than that of the auditorium, and the writer who encounters a talent director with a strong drama background backed by very limited television experience, will often find his or her script in deep trouble.

The absolute lack of a competent television talent director can be equally distressing to the writer, especially if the floor manager and

the director are technical types. Left to their own initiatives, actors seldom deliver a script effectively. Most often, they will play their own parts to the hilt and neglect the overall needs of the program. Consequently, a star may emerge but balance is lost, and the program itself is panned.

Surprisingly, the talent direction area is sometimes seen by the project leader as the least of his or her problems, but poor work in this aspect of production can ruin a script and destroy the quality of the program. Even when excellent talent direction is available, the wise writer will stay close to the action.

Writers interviewed for this manual were almost unanimous in their feelings that lack of experienced talent direction and of adequate acting, particularly in the smaller production agencies, is a major problem in seeing their scripts effectively produced.

To avoid such problems, the writer should try to be involved closely in the casting of the program, and be careful not to allow casting to occur primarily on the basis of similarity of physical appearance of the actors to the characters as described in the shooting script. The scripted, physical appearance of actors is, in most cases, easily modified by the writer and can be changed without major effect on the content. Actors' voices are their most important features and writers should

urge that casting stays as close as possible to the essential emotional and interactive *character* of the player sought.

When casting is complete and the actors' styles and delivery patterns are known, the writer must be prepared to rewrite their dialogue and actions to best draw out their talents. Of course, pre-conceived scripting should not be forced on an actor who finds the dialogue difficult to deliver, because it is easier to revise scripts than it is to change an actor's basic pattern.

The interplay among the actors as they read the script in early rehearsals may reveal to the writer qualities in the cast that can offer openings for simple changes that bring a script to life.

The writer needs to meet with the talent director as soon as possible after final casting and go over each of the roles in detail. Explanations in some depth of the image of the characters and their role in the script should be provided. Working with the talent director demands a great deal of tact from the writer, who must learn to suggest rather than demand, and to discuss characterization and movement with the talent director, rather than with the talent.

It is essential that writers recognize the characteristics of the stage-oriented talent director and, if necessary, let the program's director know how to counter the potentially

adverse results. Generally, the stage-oriented talent director will insist on characters delivering their lines with little or no pause between speeches. This can make switching very difficult in a multiple-camera, videotaped production, and will often cause a director to stay on two-shots or establishing shots for long periods of time—much to the detriment of a script calling for expressive, visual direction. Some talent directors will also often demand dramatic projection of the actors' voices and an exaggerated use of movement—particularly hand gestures. While this works for theater audiences whose distance from the action reduces exaggeration to apparently normal proportions, it can be disastrous on television, especially when camera technology is such that the viewer can often get visually closer to the talent than is humanly possible. The writer should watch for these signs and counteract them by writing explicit movement instructions, by indicating pauses in dialogue and, above all, by talking the script out with the talent director.

### Camera Persons

As is noted in the technical section of the manual, writers do not normally call for the multitude of shots that occur in a production. Shot selection is indicated in the script only as a general guideline to the director. Knowledge of the capabilities of the camera per-

sons and their equipment, however, can be invaluable to the writer, especially if the number and composition of the crew is known prior to the final scripting.

Most ITV camera people in major agencies are technically competent and can be relied upon to give adequate standard shots. Some are especially good and can bring a degree of artistry and inventiveness to the visuals if permitted to do so by the script and the director. A very few also have excellent, untapped ideas for clever use of camera techniques. An in-house writer who can get to know and talk with camera people will almost certainly expand his or her grasp of visual writing. Freelancers may find this task more difficult, owing to their absence from the center of activities. Nevertheless, an awareness of the capacity of all the crew members to add to the quality of a script can be useful to the program script writer. The writer should understand that the majority of ITV camera people have both strengths and weaknesses and be prepared to work around these limitations.

Knowledge of the studio's equipment is also important for writing scripts that take full advantage of the skills of the camera crews. Obviously, calling for simultaneous use of three cameras when but two are available, or suggesting crane shots when no crane is present, is not smart writing. Moderately

skilled camera work with good equipment will answer most normal, modern script demands quite easily, but inexperienced or sloppy camera work will produce distressing results. ITV writers working with inexperienced crews operating only basic equipment should write their scripts well within the limitations of the personnel and facilities.

Very few of the writers contacted during the preparation of this manual had given much thought to the potential quality of the camera work. Most assumed this was the director's responsibility. The exceptions to the general case, however, had a number of useful suggestions for their fellow workers including that they try to find out as early as possible during script development who the assigned crews and the back-up camera persons are to be. Viewing examples of their most recent work and getting a feel for their style and technique can be very useful. Writers should talk to the camera people and find out as much as possible about their views on the strengths and limitations of their equipment.

Once good relationships have been established with the camera crew, writers should work over a draft script with them and try to get them to suggest shots that reduce the need for dialogue or narration. Camera people should be invited to discuss with the writer the visual continuity of his script, and advise on the special qualities the equipment

might possess for getting scripted visuals across to the viewer. The camera crew should not write the production directions but when their suggestions are made out of technical expertise they should be heeded.

The writer must be wary of suggestions for new and untried techniques. One of the worst things that can happen to any script is for it to become a *tour-de-force* of technical effects. With good judgment, however, the advice of a talented camera person can help to create some sorely needed, new and effective presentations of ITV.

If possible, the writer should take a course in camera work. Understanding the technique is prerequisite to gaining mastery over it. Furthermore, if he or she is able to talk and understand the technology of the production process, many technical crew members will welcome the writer to their "bull sessions" and will be happily tolerant on the set.

### The Lighting Technician

Too many directors and almost all ITV writers are satisfied with lighting that provides a standard, clear, and accurate image. This is truly a pity, since skilled lighting is the key to the creation of ambiance and is essential to the development of mood and atmosphere.

One reason why many ITV programs and even more expensive GTV shows seem flat

and lifeless, despite their generally expert technical work and solid scripting can be directly related to unimaginative lighting. And a primary cause of lack of effective lighting is the absence of clear indications in the script of the mood and ambiance desired.

Very few writers have attempted detailed scripting of lighting, although a great many fine directors have recognized its power. Hitchcock, for example, is known to have used lighting as akin to a sinister force, so that it almost became a character in the screenplay. The ITV writer will rarely possess the technical knowledge to follow Hitchcock's lead, but there is no reason why the lighting technician cannot be encouraged by full and clear descriptions of the atmosphere and ambiance of the scene to create lighting that enhances the message rather than merely shows it to the viewer.

There are a number of helpful guides to lighting techniques available and most are written in practical terminology. If an ITV writer can develop an understanding of lighting potential and use it adventurously and effectively, the effort invested will be more than repaid in results.

The best source of immediate advice available can usually be obtained from the studio lighting experts, many of whom are often willing to talk about their specialty. Few will be able to resist offering ideas to the writer

who is prepared to discuss, and perhaps incorporate, special lighting techniques.

## Other Crew Members

Interaction with sound recording technicians, mixers and special effects people should offer useful rewards to the ITV writer in the preparation of the shooting script, both in beginning and completion stages.

The key to effective interaction between the writer and crew is to know the business of television production technology thoroughly. This means investing some personal time in acquiring a basic understanding of each aspect of the technical production of the program. It also demands a high degree of readiness to talk to and listen to the advice of technical specialists.

A writer who knows what the crew can fairly be expected to accomplish will create a workable script and will be respected by the production team. That writer's script will be more likely to receive interested and professional treatment by the floor personnel. It will rarely fail as a result of poor production technique. Regrettably, however, many ITV writers remain naive when it comes to production specifics.

## The Set Designer

There is at least one other critical person with whom the writer should work: the set

designer. Many writers in GTV spend a lot of time and typewriter ribbon describing exactly how the set or sets should look. Fewer ITV writers take the same care. Often they leave it to the designer, who reads the script and creates the set—not always according to the writer's initial perception of it.

Sets are expensive and hard to change when constructed. Often half-measures are taken and a set results that is entirely satisfactory to no one. Such unhappy outcomes can be avoided if the set designer is consulted during the early drafts of the script to discover realistic costs; take technical suggestions for improvements in basic designs; consider alternative approaches to staging the program, and establish the parameters of the design.

A writer who scripts only the dialogue in a half-imagined setting is not using the medium well. Unlike the stage, television sets are extremely variable, because the camera can move to almost any position along the line, exactly as though the viewer were present on the stage. It can go between the actors, high above them, or stand on the bridge of an individual's nose. The set, like lighting, can become almost an actor in a fine television production. It can speak eloquently or remain dumb. It can be infinitely variable in angle, lighting, presence and atmosphere. On the other hand, a set that is too dominant can

distract from the production's main theme. An appropriate balance must be reached.

For too many ITV productions, the magic of an otherwise well-produced program has been lost because the set was dull, stereotypical, unimaginative or largely irrelevant. Certainly the director must bear some responsibility for that outcome, because the look of the final production is ultimately the director's task. The set designer is also culpable, however, as there are few excuses for lack of understanding, imagination and creativity in a professional. But the basic cause is probably traceable to the writer's inadequate scripting. Writers who leave the set entirely in the hands of the designer without consultation, discussion and decision, will always be surprised and rarely satisfied.

*Chapter Four*

# A Recipe for Writing: The Conventions

Although the chapter heading indicates that script writing can be reduced to something like a recipe, the truth is that formula writing is always dull and unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, there are basic ingredients that should be included in every script writer's training, most of which are common to both ITV and GTV, but some of which have specific value for writers working in the instructional field. There are conventions followed by the majority of production houses, mainly because they enable all members of the project team to mutually understand the procedures and instructions necessary for successful

production. These conventions apply to such elements as script format, production grammar, camera shot and movement terminology, transition conventions, and so forth, and a number of agencies request writers to adhere to defined script styles containing generally agreed-upon technical grammar. So important are these conventions that most of the writers interviewed for this manual recommended that they be stressed. Accordingly, before turning to a discussion of script preparation, there follows a review of the main conventions and a brief description of the key elements of technical grammar involved in production, especially as they relate to ITV scripting. The experienced writer will probably find the descriptions elementary, but it is essential that occasional or beginning writers in ITV know and use the conventions effectively, as they represent the critical tools of the profession.

## Script Format

Formats vary widely from agency to agency and tend to differ between writers. Two main types emerge, however, as illustrated here.

The most-used type, according to the research conducted for this manual, is the left- and right-side form with the camera directions, the scenes, and the major movement patterns on the left, and the dialogue and actor directions on the right. In both GTV

and ITV, this "Type One" form is regularly used for documentaries and drama documentaries. It is less common in GTV for dramatic productions, but is often the basic type for ITV in all production formats.

The second major form is borrowed from screenplay writing for feature film production. It is written across the page as is shown in the "Type Two" example.

## Type 1 Script Example

THE SENTENCING OF
WALLY WORDSTER

FADE IN
INT. WALLY'S OFFICE
DAY WIDE SHOT

It is early morning in the offices of Words Incorporated. WALLY is talking to BESSY one of the company's clients.

The offices are plushly furnished suggesting that the company and WALLY are successful WALLY is obviously very confident as he discusses the client's problem. The SOUND of the telephone ringing interrupts the conversation.

WALLY

Now look here BESSY. You'll get all of us into trouble if you keep using sloppy English.

BESSY

Look. You ain't got no problem. No one don't understand me when I talk.

WALLY

(leaning forward to pick up the phone but keeping his hand down on the receiver for the first few words)

CAMERA MS WALLY
as he moves to
pick up the phone

CAMERA CU WALLY
as he answers the
phone.

CAMERA MS BESSY
who reacts silently
with a mixture of
defiance and
concern.

CAMERA MS WALLY
as he looks hard
and with some
compassion at
BESSY.

CAMERA ZOOMS in
to ECU BESSY as fear
fills her face.
Slow DISSOLVE to
INT. CENTRAL CONTROL
OFFICES DAY WIDE
SHOT.
Inside the processing
room BESSY waits
nervously. SOUND of
computers humming
gently.

Now you've done it BESSY.
This is sure to be Central
Control.
(picks up the receiver)
Hello. WALLY WORDSTER
here.
Yes, I know, dreadful isn't
it.
(a little irritated)
Yes, of course, I'm trying.
I'm not Henry Higgins you
know. Yes. Yes. I'll tell her.
(hangs up)

BESSY
What did they say?
WALLY

You may well ask!

(formally)
You are to report immediately
to Central Control.

VO
(mechanical tones)
You are BESSY
BLUDGEON?

CAMERA CU BESSY.

BESSY
(weakly)
Yes.

## Type 2 Script Example
## MATHEMATICS MY FRIEND

### 1. SUB TRACTION GOES VISITING

FADE IN

INT. HOUSE OF MATH DAY

WIDE SHOT

CAMERA opens on a WIDE SHOT of the INT. of the House of Math SOUND of calculators ticking and humming comes from all sides. LIGHTING is soft and subdued and the atmosphere is one of quiet efficiency in action. SUB TRACTION, the take-away expert in the House of Math, is seated before a larger computer display screen. There is a look of fury on SUB's face as she tries to cause the computer to subtract decimal numbers from the display. CAMERA ZOOMS in to CU of the computer display as the MAIN COMPUTER VOICE speaks.

MAIN COMPUTER VOICE

(somewhat edgily)

You know that I cannot subtract a larger number from a smaller number. It is not possible!

CAMERA CUTS to MS of SUB TRACTION looking down at the screen. SOUND of other COMPUTER VOICES agreeing with the MAIN COMPUTER VOICE.

SUB TRACTION

(firmly)

Of course you can. You just have to be programmed to give minus quantities.

(moves fingers towards the program modification notch)

CAMERA CU of computer screen. The computer screen goes into disarray. Diagonals and noise flash across it. SOUND of whistles and screeches of protest. Screen clears and a display appears with NO filling the whole screen. The MAIN COMPUTER speaks.

MAIN COMPUTER VOICE

No, you are not qualified to reprogram me.

CAMERA ECU of SUB TRACTION with determination on her face.

CAMERA CUT to MS as SUB TRACTION pushes the reprogram button.

CAMERA CU of MAIN COMPUTER.

MAIN COMPUTER VOICE

(desperately)

No! No!

CAMERA CU of SUB pushing the button SOUND of clicks and whistles.

CAMERA MS of SUB looking down at the MAIN COMPUTER screen

MAIN COMPUTER VOICE

(fearfully)

No! Noooooo

(voice trails off as the reprogramming button takes effect Mechanical voice replaced the fearful voice.)

I am ready for reprogramming

This full page approach offers a more literary feel to the script, since it tends to be perceived as sequential and orderly. It is often favored by somewhat less experienced writers,

especially those drawn from among former or current educators who may feel more comfortable when writing the continuous narrative. As a form, however, it might not be as effective in presenting the visual ideas of the writer to the production crew, since the dialogue is sometimes allowed to continue at length with few interruptions for illustration or instruction.

Choice of form is not of absolute importance. Unless there is an agency policy, the writer should work with the form that best suits his or her style. But in all cases the necessary instructions to the production crew must be included.

The remainder of the examples used in this manual are based upon the parallel form (Type One). Transposition of the ideas to the full page format is left to those writers who may prefer it. Experienced writers who have developed their own forms may find it necessary to discuss them with directors who may be unfamiliar with the particular style. A few minutes spent in reviewing the directions can be a time saver if it prevents misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

### Production Grammar

Unlike the flexibility often granted to writers in selecting their script form, few producers appreciate writers who break the rules of production grammar. These rules

apply to any presentational format style and are similar throughout the industry.

Production or technical grammar primarily describes camera work, settings, action, lighting, sound, dialogue and instructions to the on-camera talent. It should be used by all script writers to ensure accurate communication to members of the project team production crew. Lack of, or improper use of the grammar, will almost certainly mark the writer as an amateur. Worse, its absence or incorrect use will reduce the script's effectiveness and impair its chances of accurate and effective production. Although the use of correct production grammar will be second nature to experienced writers, the novice or occasional script writer will need to start with the basics as noted here.

### *General Production Grammar Conventions*

All movement directions are written from the camera's point of view. To do this effectively, the script writer needs only to assume the position of the imagined camera, and all directions will be correctly written.

Almost all productions begin and end with the instructions FADE IN and FADE OUT. Always capitalized, as are all instructions to the camera, FADE IN brings a picture up from black, or sometimes from color, and slowly onto the screen. The reverse process

occurs for FADE OUT. It is not technically mandatory that all openings and closings be FADES, but such is the convention unless the script has a very compelling reason for breaching it.

Two lines below FADE IN, the shot heading appears in the script. This is a basic description of the scene and of the first camera shot. The shot heading is always capitalized. In formal grammar, the first element of the shot heading informs the script reader whether the scene is INT. (interior) or EXT. (exterior) and what the key feature of the scene is to be. For example:

EXT. WASHINGTON MONUMENT

On the same line, or if there is insufficient space, on the immediately following line, an indication of time is given. Only DAY or NIGHT is written. This convention is used primarily because most production agencies have borrowed the film studio's practice of dividing their basic planning of shooting sequences into DAY or NIGHT for scheduling and budgeting.

Next, the camera direction is given, again on the same line and always capitalized. Thus: LONG SHOT. Put together, the conventional grammar for a Type One script format will appear as follows:

FADE IN

EXT. WASHINGTON MONUMENT
NIGHT LONG SHOT

A space is always left between FADE IN and the location, time and shot heading. Another space line is left between the shot heading and the more detailed shot directions.

The shot directions, which give information for the establishment of details in the opening scene, use single spaced, upper and lower case typography without indentation. In all descriptions throughout the script the word SOUND is always capitalized as is the word CAMERA. Parallel with the instructions presented in the left side of the script, several conventions are observed in the right or dialogue side. Characters' names are always written in capitals, while their words are presented with normal (except for quotation marks) punctuation in upper and lower case. All actors' instructions are given in parenthesis and are not capitalized. A typical, conventionally-written script for the opening of a production would look as follows:

HARRY AND THE WORD THIEVES

FADE IN

INT. HARRY'S DEN
NIGHT WIDE SHOT

HARRY is working at his desk in his booklined den. It is late at night. Blinds are drawn

and two lamps light the room. Only the SOUND of HARRY's pen breaks the silence until the telephone rings. HARRY picks up the receiver

HARRY

Hello?
(pauses)

CAMERA CLOSE-UP on HARRY.

Look, I think you've got the wrong number!
(listens with mounting concern)

SOUND of police car in the distance.

What do you mean you have my son?

Once the script writer has mastered these basic conventions of teleplay grammar, all that needs to be done to present a professional looking script is to gain and use an understanding of the general terminology for cameras and shot direction. Although camera terminology is very simple to master, a surprisingly large number of ITV writers are unaware of basic camera terminology and thus do not fully understand the technical instructions given by the director during the shooting of the script. As a result of their inability to offer suggestions for the visual presentation of their scripts, such writers become, in effect, co-writers with the director in the completed production.

### *Camera Terminology*

Almost all camera terminology is used in

connection with the word SHOT. There are several generally agreed upon SHOT definitions and descriptions.

ESTABLISHING SHOT (ES). The establishing shot is really a catch-all for the opening shot of the program or of a new scene. It may be of any of the shot types described below, and its purpose is to clearly establish the physical and emotional situation in which the action will occur. Many establishing shots are LONG SHOTS because they show the circumstances in which the key element in the scene is located. The original choice of ES should be made by the writer in setting the scene but the director will have ultimate responsibility for all final shot selection.

CLOSE UP (CU). The cutting line (the limit after which the shot becomes longer) for a CLOSE UP is usually through the arm-pits of the subject so that the head and shoulders are framed. CLOSE UPs are primarily used in showing the actors engaged in dialogue or in indicating the emotional reactions of an actor. In scripts dealing with non-human objects, the CU (like the ECU), is used primarily to show detail and form.

CLOSE SHOT (CS). The cutting line for this shot runs just below the chest or under the breasts of the subject. CLOSE SHOTS are the classic form of so-called "talking heads." They are the favorite shot of the

lazy or unimaginative director who will vary the camera directions in and out between the CU and the CLOSE SHOT. The shot can be very flexible, however, and is certainly the basic shot used in most scripts involving dialogue or interviews. A smart writer will not over-use the CLOSE SHOT and will guard against its use as a stock shot by a too-tired director.

MEDIUM SHOT (MS). In a MEDIUM SHOT, all of the subject above the knees will be seen. The shot allows for background detail to be shown and provides for some mobility of the actor within the shot. The common call of the director of a talk show for a TWO SHOT or a THREE SHOT generally signifies a need for a MEDIUM SHOT. Unless the guests are very close together, a MEDIUM SHOT will not cover more than three and usually handles two comfortably.

FULL SHOT (FS). It is universally regarded as bad camera technique to cut a subject off at the ankles. A FULL SHOT will always show the body of the actor with both head and foot room. Standing actors will have good "head room" in all full shots and they should also have sufficient "foot room."

LONG SHOT (LS). A LONG SHOT is anything shot longer than a FULL SHOT. It can, and often does, stretch to infinity.

WIDE SHOT (WS). This shot is designed to provide a broader lateral coverage of the

scene. Sometimes a shorter focal length lens is used to achieve a WIDE SHOT, but most stuido cameras deliver a single wide angle shot which may be described as WIDE or LONG. Essentially the difference lies in the purpose of the writer, who may wish to indicate either lateral expanse, or depth. In most instances, the director will tell a camera person to widen the shot, pull back, or lengthen it. In each case, the instruction essentially means to move from a closer shot to a longer one.

All of the shots noted above have been described for a fixed camera. The camera can, of course, move, and modern studios have elaborate systems for moving it. When the camera does have mobility, interesting combinations of shots and movement can occur. Most of the time these will be worked out in detail by the director, but a writer who understands and can use the technique of camera movement will add flexibility to his or her visual script conceptions and will help to avoid the stilted look that often accompanies static camera productions.

*Camera Movement*

There are three main types of camera movement that should be understood and utilized by the writer–panning, travelling, and zooming.

A *panning* camera is used to provide a

smooth horizontal covering or scanning of a subject. It can also be used to follow a moving subject. In some instances, both camera and subject may move, and the movement may be either spasmodic or continuous.

*Travelling* cameras can be difficult to work with, but when mastered, offer the writer a key to developing part of the essence of television—visual involvement. Travelling can range from parallel tracking to longitudinal and, given a crane or other structural mounting, to vertical. A travelling camera can place the viewer so that he or she appears to be the subject following the center of interest throughout the planned action.

The development of the *zoom* lens rendered turreted camera equipment almost obsolete in most agencies. The special characteristics of the zoom make it valuable to the writer. The zoom offers great flexibility in shot selections. In the hands of a skilled camera person, it will provide fluid representations of the subject matter. A key difference between the optical zoom from longitudinal tracking in or out mechanically is its ability to maintain an equal magnification of all parts of the scene as it moves from ECU to WIDE SHOT. This useful feature is in contrast to the change in perspective that occurs in tracking in and out. A writer who is aware of the various optical properties and their effects when used is in an excellent position to write the visual ef-

fects that will enhance the script, reduce the amount of dialogue, create ambiance, develop or reduce tension, and provide the viewer with exciting visual experiences. Such writers can achieve the difficult art of "telewriting," the combining of audio and visual parts in a whole greater than their sum.

There are many different shots and movements possible for cameras, but the more esoteric should be left to the director to develop, as he or she establishes the shot list for production. However, the script writer with general knowledge of camera technique who is able to accurately indicate the visual "feel" of the program, will materially help the production crew toward its creation. At the very least, the basic shot and camera movement instructions should be written into the script.

### *Transitions Between Shots*

There are a number of techniques for changing shots, either in one or multiple camera productions. Most television scripts are multicamera when produced in the studio, in which case the transitions are made initially by the studio switcher in response to the director's call. Programs made on film, or as a combination of film and tape, use transitions between shots in a different fashion. These are usually done in a laboratory, primarily by a film editor assisted by optical ef-

fects specialists. In either case, however, the conventions for the scripting of the transitions are generally consistent and standardized.

The separations between sequences in a television presentation or program are usually referred to as punctuations or transitions. There are a number of conventional transitions which are used both in film and television to indicate the passage of time, the change of scene, or a change of mood. The best known of these are the fades, dissolves, cuts, wipes, lighting changes; and the movements of actors, props, sets, and action. Some of these also fall under the heading of special effects, but all are used to produce transitions and can be valuable additions to a writer's collection of techniques. For the purpose of this manual, concentration will be placed upon the more common instructions for transitions such as those a writer might be most likely to include in the script.

FADES. The use of the fade in or fade out is generally considered an effective way to indicate passage of time. The screen gradually darkens in the fade out and is replaced by another image fading in. Sometimes the second image appears abruptly, which of course provides a different feel or atmosphere to the shot. Most fades are made into and out of black, but, on occasion, colors are used or the fade is made to white. Fading to white is done

more often in film production than in television since a white television screen is less favorably viewed than is either a black or colored screen.

Recent research in the use of color fades has indicated that going from the picture into bright colors, such as highly saturated reds or yellows, produces an attention-getting reaction from the viewers. Since the nature of ITV often makes normal attention-getting via the action of the program rather difficult, careful use of color fades may help to maintain interest in the visuals and heighten their impact upon the viewer. As is always the case when using these techniques, discretion is essential, otherwise the program will degenerate rapidly into a showcase of effects and lose its integrity.

DISSOLVES. The most commonly used transition to indicate the passage of time or a change of scene is the dissolve. Dissolves are actually no more than fade ins superimposed upon fade outs either slowly or quite quickly. The essence of the dissolve is to create a change of scene from an earlier situation to one later in time or in a different place.

In television production, dissolves are accomplished by the switcher at the effects board through the director's instructions. In film production they are created by the optical specialists in the laboratory. In either case they represent a simple technique for indicating to the producer or director the neces-

sary shifts of time and place that will occur. In some instances, they are used as advance informers of upcoming events. In such cases they are produced as long, very slow dissolves that are almost superimpositions over ongoing action. As with all special techniques, they can become tedious if over-employed.

WIPES. With the advent of advanced technology in television switchboards, the number and style of wipe techniques has increased dramatically. An image can be moved from or around the screen in almost every imaginable way. It can be a simple horizontal or vertical wipe of one scene into another; it can be a circular wipe, or a fragmented wipe. Almost any geometrical shape that is desired can be expanded to fill the entire screen with the new image as slowly or rapidly as desired by the director.

The use or abuse of electronically generated wipes is generally the prerogative of the director in consultation with the production crew. Wipes are not often written into the directions by the script writer. As a result, they appear more often in the shot listing and shooting script stages, when the director finally works through the script to determine how the visual production will look. The variety of wipes available can be used with skill and materially enhance the action as envisaged by the writer. Too often, however, they become a visual feature in and of themselves. In that


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case, the director should use them only sparingly and with discretion.

The writer should personally take care not to be carried away with any newfound knowledge of the numberless available wipes. There is an old axiom that holds that special effects are often used in lieu of creative dramatic writing. A thin script, laden with such effects, will usually fail to either entertain or instruct. Consequently, great care is needed to avoid writing a script filled with good but irrelevant transitional techniques. The advancing technology available to the television producer needs to be well understood by the writer, but it should be used with care and caution in the creation of the actual teleplay.

On the other hand, the special needs of instructional television in the presentation of information, sometimes perceived by the target audience as likely to be inherently dull, can be well served by effective employment of advanced production technology. Properly used, such effects can add to the visual and pedagogical interest of the program. This is especially so in the use of such techniques as supers, split screens, zooms, instant replays, and chroma key.

FOCUS. The use of the focus-fade is an old film technique often used to indicate flashbacks and other time transitions. Use of the focus to reduce an image to a very ill-perceived form on the screen followed by a sharpening

of the image in a different context, time or place, conventionally suggests the flashback or flash-forward required by the script writer to inform the audience of past or future happenings. In effect, this is an optically induced dissolve, with the difference that the image does not fade to near black before replacement by the new image, but instead moves out of and into focus. The effect is softer and occasionally more compelling as a transition than is the usual form of dissolve.

As with other transitions, however, the more exotic types of dissolve are usually left to the director. It is essential, however, that the writer understand each of these techniques of transition so that if there is a specific need for one or another of them to be employed, it can be incorporated into the visual directions presented in the script.

There are myriad transition techniques that can be developed using props, lighting, scene changes, character changes, and sound. Props such as calendars, clocks, time lapse photography on growing or deteriorating objects, and seasonal changes can all be used to illustrate the passage of time. *Lighting* can be used to display for the viewer a transition from morning, through noon, to afternoon, dusk and into evening. It can also be used to indicate a change of mood as well as scene or place. For example, the script writer may not wish to lose the concept of the setting or the

ambiance of the scene by using a camera technique, and would thus go to lighting changes to illustrate the passage of time through a given day.

A more recent innovation in film and television production has been the use of *sound* to indicate an impending transition achieved by a cut from one shot to another. In the sound technique, the voice or effect properly belonging in the following scene is introduced into the current scene prior to the end of the shot. For instance, the voice of the actress in another city is heard imposed over the scene of an accident in which her husband is injured. The viewer is warned that a cut to the new actress is impending and, sure enough, the scene changes to the new location. This same technique can be used as a bridging device on either end of a scene.

In very low budget productions or in those productions where the technical skill of the crew or the potentials of the equipment are limited, simple *graphics* may be used to indicate transition. Again, these should be scripted by the writer if he or she has a particular need for specific techniques to be used.

Transition graphics are usually of the type that say "Sometime Later," or "In Another City," or perhaps "Many Years Ago." Although rather hackneyed, the graphic offers the writer in a low budget production an easy

and inexpensive way to clearly indicate to the viewer the time and place concepts necessary to understand the program. Of course, such graphics assume that the audience is able to read or interpret them accurately.

In adequately budgeted productions, talented direction can create such skillful transitions between shots that the viewer is unaware his or her attention has been redirected. For example, a scene showing a pilot in the cockpit of a commercial aircraft looking down at the clock indicating both the current time and the estimated time of arrival, can be followed by the camera to an ECU of the clock. The camera then pulls back to a wide shot and the clock is now seen to be in the control tower at the destination airport.

The purpose of such a transition is to indicate the importance of time to both scenes. In cases such as this, the transition not only shifts the attention from place to place, but indicates an element of the story line itself. Script writers who are truly aware of the television medium can use such transitions to avoid unnecessary dialogue or explanatory graphics ("Meanwhile, back in the Control Tower") and to heighten the visual impact of the program itself.

Undoubtedly the most-used transition or camera change in all television is the *cut*. Almost all shot lists contain a preponderance of instructions beginning with CUT TO.

Conventionally CUT TO is not indicated directly in the script but is assumed to be the transition used if no other is written in its place. Occasional use of the direction is excusable, however, as the writer may wish to ensure that a cut and no other transitional form is used.

It is also important for the writer to remember that there is no such thing as a "slow cut" or a "fast cut" to anything. A cut always occurs at exactly the same speed in any television presentation, otherwise it will become a dissolve or a wipe.

*Chapter Five*

# Understanding and Using Production Technology

As has been emphasized previously in this manual, all members of the project team and production crew have their special tasks to perform. Given basic competence among the members of the team, each can be relied upon to apply his or her expertise to the script's production.

While the writer has been advised to discuss the project with the production crew members, such meetings are not always possible. The production crew may be too busy to discuss particular problems of a given script, however, and may prefer instead to talk only with the director. Nevertheless, it is

essential the writer understand the basic work requirements and activities of each specialist on the crew.

Even though the script may not require the incorporation of elaborate instructions for sound, lighting, or set designs, the writer should have a clear idea of how the finished program should look. This will involve some knowledge and understanding of the techniques of lighting, sound recording, mixing, and set design.

## Lighting

Television lighting has two major purposes: mechanical and artistic. In the first instance, the primary concern is simply to provide enough light for the camera to be able to record the scene in a technically acceptable manner. Mechanical lighting problems can be safely left to the director and his or her studio crew. If the lighting is mechanically bad, the project leader should take appropriate action.

The second form of lighting is more creative, and a matter for discussion between director, writer and lighting technician. Artistic lighting is, in the opinion of successful writers, part of the program's overall conception, and should be considered a major element of scripting. Lighting has several properties that can materially change an audience's reaction to the program. A writer who is able to

manipulate lighting effectively in developing the visual appearance of a program will have a distinct advantage in creating a successful script.

Too many ITV productions are characterized by unimaginative lighting. This is due largely to the fact that agencies and broadcasters are satisfied if the lighting merely illuminates the subject matter. Rarely in ITV is a lighting technician called upon early in the program development to discuss possible lighting assistance to the script. This omission occurs when writers fail to understand the potential of lighting to create mood, atmosphere, or emotion. While it is no easy task to think visually in terms of lighting when preparing a script, if the skill is mastered the writer will discover it is possible to eliminate large amounts of dialogue or graphic directions by simply presenting the key instructional elements in a specially lit form.

Subtle variations in lighting and in the use of special color effects may create a pattern of responses in the viewers which can substantially change their readiness to receive and process the instructional content. For example, if a program for high school students on elements of witchcraft in Shakespearean drama is in production, it is fairly easy to imagine the role of lighting in the scenes played in the castles or on the heaths.

Few people would argue with the necessity for collaboration between writer, director and lighting technician in establishing the correct mood in such an example. Many, however, might miss the importance of lighting in other instances which occur more often in ITV productions. When the scene changes from the "blasted heath" to the on-camera commentator discussing the literary quality and techniques used in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the person will typically appear in a studio interview set lit with standard lighting, thus reducing the show's potential magic. A writer who understands the power of lighting, however, might write in the directions for a darkly or luridly lit set that reflected the gloom and blood of the play itself. The commentator would then appear to be part of the mood, and be better able to retain the audience's interest in the more directly instructional component of the program. In such instances, scripting of the lighting style can be critically important.

## Sound

Almost every writer for television includes script directions to the producer or the director on the use of sound. Most of these directions are related to sound identifying a particular person or to the sounds made by animals and manmade objects. But the use of sound as a scripting characteristic is

limited in the minds of many writers who see its only purpose as simple identification rather than as a potential artistic form, and thus is left unexploited by most ITV writers.

Sound can convey mood, tension, timing, activity, pace, and even thoughtfulness. The art of writing for sound was probably at its most highly developed period from 1930 through 1950, when radio plays were at their zenith. Although many similarities exist between the use of sound on radio and in television, writing sound for television requires a change of perspective; since the imagination of the viewer is partially limited by what has been presented in the visual portion of the program. Where once, in radio, the sound of a horse's hooves approaching conjured up for the listener an image based on his own experience with horses, the same sound on television is usually accompanied by horses on the screen, which means the sound has to be more tied to visual "reality" in television than in radio.

The basic principles of scripting sound for use on radio, however, can be adapted to television by simply considering how the script might be produced if it were a radio program. What sounds are absolutely necessary for identification? How can sound be used to create the mood? What sounds used prior to the presentation of the visuals can establish in the viewer's mind a preset



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expectation of what is to come? Each of these questions is particularly valuable when scripting for ITV where gaining an early correct perspective is very often critical to the "take" of the instructional segment.

Many ITV productions are characterized by simple mechanical sound recording. Music mixes, special sound effects, and scripted sound intended to heighten the expression of the program's instructional content are relatively rare occurrences. As a result, ITV programs often appear flat, or incomplete. An experienced writer might try developing sound patterns in the absence of dialogue, or creating advanced sound cues to the visual patterns. This can be a very effective attention-getting device since many viewers will continue to listen to television even after their visual attention has been distracted.

## Sound Mixing

Mixing the sound tracks, either during production or later during the editing process, is often critical to the program's finished quality. Most producer/directors will agree that achieving good quality sound is one of their most difficult tasks. "Miking" the set requires an exceptionally skillful technician, and the lack of quality sound apparent in many ITV programs indicates just how important the sound technician and his equip-

ment can be. This is especially the case when the script calls for a mix of effects or music.

The mixing of sounds can produce remarkable changes of mood and atmosphere. This is accomplished by varying components of the sound and manipulating such aspects as their relative intensity or their pitch, or by exploiting other properties such as reverberation and resonance. For example, the writer may seek to create a mood of expectation as the solution to a problem in the science sequence approaches. The script's talent directions will call for increasing excitement to be projected in the actors' voices. Its directions to the sound technician may call for supportive, tension-building effects, including: an increase in the rate and intensity of the ticks coming from a wall clock; a heightened hissing and bubbling from the mixture in the laboratory; a rising note from the wind whistling around the windows; the introduction of an up-beat tempo to the music mix, and so on.

Left to their imaginations, many directors and sound technicians will provide good basic sound for the program. Some will attempt to develop some form of sound ambiance, and a few will invest the script with high quality, imaginative mixing. A writer, who really *is* interested in helping create a good program from the ideas in the script, must learn sound and mixing and should be able to indicate its use in the script.

## Set Design

Almost every script writer will develop an outline of the sets where the program's action is to occur. Typically, only a bare outline is given, usually just enough to establish the basic patterns necessary for the set designer to begin work. The writer foregoes the opportunity to further develop his creativity when the set is poorly or barely described, however. At the very least, the writer should be capable of using some broad artistic aims of set design such as realism, fantasy and non-representationism.

Realistic sets are categorized in three main types: the exact replica of an actual scene; "atmospheric realism" which indicates only a type of scene without attempting absolute accuracy of detail; and "symbolic realism" in which a few associated details are drawn together to create only symbolically a suggestion of time and place.

Fantasy sets are also classified into three main types—abstraction, silhouette, and the bizarre. Abstraction is the arrangement of shape, form and texture to express mood or character, and has very little similarity to the real world. Such abstractions are the basis of many ITV sets in which budget restraints prevent reality designs. They are almost an industry standard for talk shows and current affairs programming.

Silhouette sets are stylized outlines of what might have been a reality design. Such sets can be very useful for ITV since they are relatively inexpensive and are able to convey fairly the necessary data in historical or literary productions. They are often less valuable in comtemporary reality programming since they may lend an air of incompleteness to the set.

Bizarre sets can be marvelously effective when used with discretion in ITV, but caution is strongly advised since they can dominate a screenplay. Characteristically, bizarre sets invoke "deliberately distorted reality." They lean heavily on bent perspectives and favor illusions of weird proportions. Used well by an ITV producer, they can add magic to the dullest of basic skills materials. Injudicious use, however, will create boring and pretentious television.

Another type of set design is created from neutral non-representation where the use of a colored or black limbo is typical. No association of ideas is intended and is only accidental when it does occur. Many ITV sets are based on the neutral approach, partly because they are the least expensive form of set and sometimes because the writer failed to specify a more expressive set design.

A good set can become almost a character in the teleplay and no script should ever be written without careful thought to its design.

## Special Effects

Knowledge, understanding and judicious use of special effects can substantially increase a writer's ability to help achieve the instructional objectives of ITV.

Some danger exists that special effects may be used for themselves rather than for what they can do to enhance the instructional quality of the program. But certain effects can be most useful in presenting the key material in a way compatible with the viewers' personal learning styles. Some techniques that offer special advantages to the ITV script writer include chroma key, instant replay, and split screen.

The use of *chroma key* "window" display (for example, charts or graphics with a host) is seen frequently in ITV. The narrator can even be inserted into the scene itself. Such techniques are able to provide a visual link between the narrator as surrogate for the audience, and the visuals being shown.

Chroma key may also be used to show interactions between human and animated or puppet figures; or to illustrate complex internal workings of machines, reactions, or instruments. Protagonists can be placed in contexts they could not possibly have entered in a real situation. Psychologically, the chroma key technique may be likened to televising the workings of the human imagination. With it, the host or surrogate viewer can be trans-

ported to any corner of the universe, placed within any scene or inside any object—immense or microscopic.

Unlike chroma key, *instant replay* is seldom used in ITV. Yet it is similar to short-term memory in its function, and it, too, can offer a fresh perspective on a well-known outcome.

Instant replay has been used primarily in sports broadcasting, partly to re-present what happened in a particular play, but also to illustrate the same play from different perspectives. Adaptation of similar approaches may have great value in writing for ITV, especially in the creation of basic skills programming for in-school broadcasts, and in adult programming focusing on the activities of people engaged in career or retraining courses. Instant replays of complex processes in math, or the replay of incidents from differing personal or physical perspectives may reinforce instructional content and complete the understanding of already partly-learned material.

Despite its power to present a wide range of materials, broadcast television remains a continuous medium. Unlike print, it does not allow the learner to review materials by going back over them as one might re-read information in printed form. Dynamic rather than static, it can offer little opportunity for "stopping and thinking." "Think and review" breaks have been tried, but without

much success, as they sometimes result in loss of viewer interest in the entire program. Mere repetition of already-shown content is usually boring, lacking in attention-holding power. By writing in "instant replays" from different camera angles, the content can be reshown without significant change and thus can be offered for consolidation, re-learning, or completion, all without undue tedium. During the replay, the "color commentator" can point to additional detail not immediately obvious in the first presentation. For example, in a careers training program, part of the original action from the applicant's point of view in an interview might be written for replay from the perspective of the interviewer, and again from the viewpoint of a secretary/assistant. Key parts may be reshown and the critical components analyzed, much in the same way that football color commentators analyze the components of a play, or tennis experts examine strokes and tactics. Used judiciously, the instant replay can offer an effective means for recapitulation without repetition.

Care should be taken in writing directions for the use of *split screens*. Some research suggests that viewers have difficulty in watching two parts of the screen simultaneously and instead monitor only one part of the split screen and direct primary attention to the other. This is a highly developed form of

selective attention that can be exploited by providing continuity while at the same time emphasizing a key aspect of the content. For example, in a historical production it would be possible to show Napoleon in split screen watching a battle from a distance prior to committing his reserves. On the other part of the split the viewer could watch, at close hand, the individual soldiers in actual combat. This would convey visually the theoretical point of the general-in-command making decisions while remote from the scene of action.

Presenting multiple examples of a topic area is a further use of the split. Rapid eye movement on the part of the viewer typically occurs as the viewer looks at each of the segments of a multi-split screen. This suggests audiences are prepared to invest greater efforts viewing a split picture than they will when a single picture is on the screen. Voice-over, when related to the split, can control direction and sequence of attention as can optical or mechanical cueing to the segments.

Although the content contained in split screens could be presented sequentially in separate full screen visuals, the split has an advantage in that it allows each salient segment to remain "up" for review or re-discovery. Also, it offers the writer the opportunity to impress the viewer with some final emphasis, by expanding the critical scene to

fill the screen and thereby physically and psychologically "block" the alternatives.

*Chapter Six*

# Writing the ITV Script

## Choosing the Script Form

There are almost limitless variations available in the choice of script form for the ITV writer, but scripts for both GTV and ITV production fall into four main categories: Narrative documentary, drama documentary, magazine, and dramatic. The choice between each of these forms should be made on the basis of target audience composition, the nature of the instructional content, the budget, the available talent, the studio facilities, the running time, the number of programs in the series, the eventual educational usage of the program, and other factors related to reasons for selecting the project in the first place.

Unfortunately, the choice is usually made



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on the basis of the format most admired and regularly used by the writer and the project team. Sometimes, however, the chosen format is beyond the creative range of both the writer and the agency, or the available on-camera talent is incapable of executing the program. Despite these serious handicaps the script is followed anyway—often with disastrous results.

A general rule of this manual is that it is far more useful to do a competent job on a non-ambitious project than it is to fail in attempts to create programs that are clearly beyond the ability of the team and agency. Paradoxically, it is another general rule that every writer should work near the limit of the organization's production capacity, whatever the chosen format. The important factor is to select the script form that best suits the needs of the project and can be produced by the team given the available budget, facilities and talent. It should also be noted that the subject matter, the needs of the instructional objectives and the characteristics of the target audience should all play a part in determining the appropriate format.

### *The Narrative Documentary*

The narrative documentary has long been the basic production format of "serious" CTV shows and has been adapted success-

fully for use in ITV. Unfortunately, however, it has also been over-used by ITV in producing "talking heads" and voice-over narrations dealing with almost every instructional subject area. Characteristically, the narrative documentary is constructed from a wide range of visuals including film, slides, graphics, studio segments and most recently, electronic field production videotape. The visuals are linked by a common subject and are explained by either an on-camera studio host, an announcer voice-over, a travelling host who visits the locations and comments on-site, or some combination thereof.

Classic narrative documentaries on GTV usually deal with intellectually stimulating topics such as *Civilization*, *The Ascent of Man* and *The Age of Uncertainty*. But in ITV, the format has been used to present math, teach geography, illustrate the history of law-making in the United States, and describe the plight of Africans in the Third World. In short, the ITV narrative documentary may be so over-used that its freshness has been impaired and its intellectual impact lost. The advent of electronic field production equipment may serve to further entrench the narrative form as a basic style of ITV, especially since the newer equipment specifications meet the general engineering standards of PBS stations.

*Characteristics of the Narrative Documentary*

When used for ITV production, the narrative documentary possesses several useful characteristics, including directness of presentation, wide applicability and simple scripting. In addition, audiences are inclined to pay more attention, transitions are easier, and a variety of film mediums can be used in their production.

A great deal of instructional information can be presented in a narrative documentary in an unforced, honest and direct way. Since the narrative style does not pretend to be anything other than informative, the writer is free to be as direct as desired, with a style as "content-loaded" as the topic and target audience will bear. Continuity aspects of the narrative and its logical development are well received by teachers, particularly those who tend to have a didactic style.

Furthermore, the narrative is applicable to almost any topic, and because a great deal of information can be carried in the visuals, wordiness and tedium in the audio track can be eliminated.

Scripting the audio content for the format is relatively simple. A straightforward, direct style is possible, and the writer need employ only a moderate amount of dramatic interplay between audio and visual to achieve success.

Because the documentary's approach is di-

rect, viewing audiences expect to be educated, and as a consequence, there may be less need for expensive production techniques designed to capture attention. Good use of standard production techniques will usually suffice, provided the program has *fine* visuals and a well-balanced pace.

The form also allows the writer to move easily in transitions through time and geographical space without resorting to difficult or expensive techniques. The voice-over requires only some indication of the nature of the transition for the audience to readily accept the information.

Because of its "newsy" look, the narrative documentary can use stock footage or newly shot material of greatly varying technical quality more easily than can other formats. Dark or grainy film from stock or historical libraries, or material shot on hand-held or on-location electronic field production equipment using the new standards of 1" recording, will have a verité appearance to them, and may even enhance the atmosphere of reality often at the heart of a program's success.

Despite its apparent simplicity, however, the narrative documentary demands careful attention to scripting detail, particularly careful timing of audio to visual components. The writer must take care that the continuity of the visuals and the flow of the audio match effectively. It is necessary, too, to ensure

proper timing of inserts of stock film, videotape and studio shots.

Too many examples of the narrative format are produced without regard to their technical balance, especially in visuals sequencing. Brightly lit and technically well-produced studio portions can be ruined by poor quality slides or dark film, unless these are carefully worked into the program and given special consideration in either the audio portion or in placement in the video.

The ITV documentary writers interviewed have found it is essential to avoid redundancies in audio and visual scripting. When the audio repeats what is obvious in the visuals, time is wasted and viewers are either bored or lost entirely. However, if the audio and visual components of the program are not closely matched, the message of the audio will be lost and the message of the video will be less than complete.

Effective documentaries are capsules of reality and the writing must therefore have the feel of reality, Flights of fancy in the narrative should be indulged in only sparingly. Clean, crisp prose delivered in uncomplicated sentences is essential, especially when the documentary is being produced for younger, or poorly educated audiences. In fact, even highly educated viewers turn off a television program if the writing is pretentious or unnecessarily complex.

The visuals should do as much of the "talking" as possible. Even committed viewers of "high quality" programs, if shown a *Civilization* script, would be astonished at how little depth is present in the audio information. Most of the information contained in the narrative could be readily found in a 10th grade history book. Yet, the narration always seemed firm and "somehow" highbrow. The reason for the impact of *Civilization* may be found in the match that existed between the highly expressive visuals and the simple, clear narration providing only information that could not be imparted by the visuals, or was needed to direct attention to important aspects of them.

Wherever possible, the narrator should be in the scene and out of the announcer's booth. Personalization of the narrator and interaction between host and visuals will bring life to the documentary and allow a welcome vicarious entry for the viewer.

Different writing techniques are necessary when the documentary involves stock or historical footage compared to one written in which all of the visuals are to be subsequently filmed. In the former, the script must be constructed to accommodate the content of the available footage; in the latter the script calls for special material but must also recognize the actual realities and difficulties of shooting the necessary materials.

The narrative documentary can use any of the known techniques of television to present its information. It may employ the interview, a talking head monologue, cinema verité or even some partially dramatized segments. However, it must always maintain a continuity of purpose to guard against becoming fragmented and illogical.

Although the primary purpose of the ITV narrative documentary is to instruct or to inform a particular target audience, it must, nevertheless, hold attention. Therefore, it should have similar qualities of dramatic involvement as any other form of television. Indeed, the narrative documentary requires more concern for variable pacing, camera technique, teasing, mystery, surprise and staging than will a drama, which might be carried by the quality of the acting or by the strength of the plot line. Successful narrative writers are well aware of the value of music mixes, special effects and crisp dramatic writing.

*Use of the Narrative Documentary* The narrative documentary form has been used in ITV primarily to present instruction or information on history, geography, current affairs and civics. It has a long background of use in ITV and has often appeared in a thin, dull form, disguised as a teacher presenting a lesson directly to the viewer.

Whenever the visuals are used to illustrate an instructional line of script, a narrative documentary is close at hand. It is a useful format for low budget productions, although it should not be restricted to such roles. It is extremely valuable when talent restrictions or technical facility problems are present. When given careful and sufficient thought, it can be well used to provide information, to air different viewpoints on controversial issues, and to create interest in the realities of the world for all manner of target audiences. Its best purpose is to present reality clearly and dramatically, whether that reality is the eruption of a volcano, the process of nuclear fission or the derivation of the binomial theorem. Although it can be entertaining and must hold attention, the primary use of the narrative documentary is the transmission of information, and should be scripted accordingly.

*Script Format for a Narrative Documentary* The script format for the documentary is similar to the Type One format presented earlier in this manual, but there are a number of modifications usually appropriate to the narrative form. It is usual for provision to be made on the visual side of the script to indicate the nature of the various forms of visuals to be included. For example, after the opening titles and following the establish-

ment of the narrator in the structure of the show (perhaps in a studio shot or on location), the script may call for a series of slides, or the use of a cut from some stock footage, at which time the narration would go to voice over.

The typical narrative documentary script will most likely be presented as a series of numbered segments, as suggested in the example below. (Note: No attempt has been made to write an *interesting* narrative—merely an illustrative one.)

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 (Film) A young and energetic looking TEACHER standing in front of a seated group of children having a reading lesson in an open classroom The TEACHER introduces the lesson | TEACHER SYNC (to the class) O K kids, here comes today's horror story Who wants to be chief ghoul? |
| 2 SAME MS of grubby KID wanting to be first reader | NARRATOR BEGINS Does this remind you of the way things were? I'll bet you a ghoul to a vampire it doesn't |
| 3 SAME WS of class not interested in the lesson All seem to be doing their own thing | Just what is going on in our schools today? What has happened to Basic Education? |
| 4 DISSOLVE to LS of a school class of 1934. | This is how it really was, and a lot of educators |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | children in neat rows. TEACHER up front, hearing the reading of a standing child. | think that's how it should be today. |
| 5 | SAME. CU of reading child. MUSIC up as the child comes to end of passage. | CHILD SYNC. (reading) And so the story ended. The prince and princess lived happily ever after in the fairy's castle. |
| 6 | WS NARRATOR in front of chroma key window | NARRATOR. Well, just how bad have things become? These figures show the true picture. |
| 7 | SLIDE. Bar graph of reading scores for grade six children after last three decades | A serious decline in reading scores has occurred since World War II. |

There are many variations on the script format for narrative documentaries, but all tend to follow the same system of linking visuals and audio. The conventional grammar for technical directions should be followed closely and the script should be tightly timed.

### *The Drama Documentary*

*Characteristics of the Drama Documentary.* The drama documentary was once a major form of television presentation on CTV. Real life incidents were dramatized on a number





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of law-related shows and were the key elements of "reality based" TV theatre productions. The "true life" incidents were used to point to a moral imperative, to illustrate dangerous activities, or to dramatize the interest and excitement present in life. This form has almost disappeared from GTV, but is still alive in ITV where it is both used in broadcast and non-broadcast productions for delivery of instructional content.

The drama documentary uses a mix of narration and dramatization to present its materials. It has great appeal for those agencies, preferring not to use the fantasy quality of television because of the philosophical notion that education should be reality-based. Usually, the dramatization will be illustrative of the instructional content and the narration will focus on specifics. Actors will play out the roles to be expected of real people found in the situations included in the theme. Most of the audio will be voice-over.

The format has proven very valuable for presentation of historical or current affairs and civics content, since it mixes the play of the historical or currently prominent personages with the narration of the modern interpreter. An example of one form of drama documentary that has been used on both GTV and ITV is a Canadian production, *Witness to Yesterday*, in which a modern host in a studio setting interviews key figures

from the past. Actors dressed in period clothing play the role of the historical personages. The interview is actually a documentary, in that "set-up" questions enable the actor to present the personage's particular viewpoint or to provide contemporary historical data, while the host interprets the presentation from modern perspectives.

While there are almost endless format options available to the writer who chooses to work with the drama documentary, there is also at least one major disadvantage. Despite its being drawn from reality, the form often appears less real than does a purely fictional drama. The interaction of narration and drama seems, on occasion, to rob the program of some portion of its perceived truth. As a result, audience attention and interest can be lost if the drama is weakly acted or if the narration is unduly pompous. Willing suspension of disbelief seems to be at its lowest level in ITV drama documentaries.

The narrative documentary differs from the drama documentary chiefly because it presents a segment of "true" reality taken from actual happenings, with the real persons involved in them shown on the screen. On the other hand, the dramatic form relies upon a staged recreation of events, usually backed by additional data designed to provide a generalization of the issues contained in the script.

*Points to Remember When Scripting a Drama Documentary.* All of the points noted previously for the narrative documentary apply as well to the dramatic format with some additions. For example, the drama documentary offers the writer opportunities to trigger emotions, develop ideas, and to follow them with commentary or analysis by the narrator. Scripting of the interaction between the host and the dramatic portions is critical to the success of most drama documentaries.

The documentary format based upon a real life situation but played by talented actors can avoid the occasional incoherence or slowness of action that often occur in the narrative documentary. Writers have much greater control over the precise content of the drama documentary and can refine "truth" as required to gain stronger pacing or impact.

*Uses of the Drama Documentary.* The uses of the dramatic form of the documentary are the same as those listed for the narrative, and any differences that do exist apply more to format than to the program's intended use.

Drama documentaries have been created to teach information, ideas, attitudes and reactions to almost every subject in or out of the curriculum. Their instructional flexibility, combined with the fact that they present a built-in authority figure, makes them particularly useful and pleasing to both producers

and educators. They will probably continue to form the basis of many ITV programs in the foreseeable future.

*Script Format for a Drama Documentary.* The script format for a drama documentary is often a combination of typical dramatic scripting written as a vignette, and the standard narrative form. Both are then incorporated as an integrated section of the script. The format for the dramatic vignette may also be fully written as a mini-script and incorporated directly into the final version of the shooting script.

A page from a drama documentary script will usually resemble the example provided below.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 LS NARRATOR standing on grassy knoll in Dallas. CAMERA ZOOMS to CU. | NARRATOR<br>It was here that witnesses claimed they heard the shots. |
| 2 DISSOLVE to LS group on grassy knoll MS two WITNESSES talking. SOUND of crowd CS of WITNESS 1. SOUND of approaching motorcade | WITNESS 1<br>I guess that they'll be comin' by any minute now. |
| SOUND of cheering and clapping. CU WITNESS 2. | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | WITNESS 2<br>Here they come. Yeah Kennedy. |
| SOUND of cars passing. WS crowd on grassy knoll watching the motorcade. SOUND of two shots. ECU WITNESS 1. | |
| | WITNESS 1<br>(startled)<br>My God! Gunshots. |
| DISSOLVE to CU NARRATOR<br>CAMERA pulls back to LS of NARRATOR at Arlington Cemetery. | NARRATOR<br>Well, that's the way some believe it all happened. Was there a conspiracy? |

The illustration above clearly employs a drama documentary form, since no reality film of witnesses to the Kennedy assassination was ever taken. Dramatization of the incident saves many words of descriptive dialogue that would otherwise have been necessary. The dramatic play in the re-creation of the scene probably has much greater audience appeal than would a slide or drawing.

As with the narrative form, there are a variety of techniques for scripting the dramatized documentary. For example, the directions may call merely for the rolling of the pre-taped dramatic sections as they appeared in the run of the program. In such cases, the script would look like the excerpt below, which is drawn from another non-existent production on the same theme.

| | |
|---|---|
| FADE IN<br>EXT CAPITOL BUILDING<br>DAY LS<br>The NARRATOR stands before the Capitol Building<br>SOUND of traffic nearby<br>CAMERA ZOOMS in to CU<br>NARRATOR | NARRATOR<br>Once J.F.K. walked here and breathed life and action into the government of his country. Then, on a day in November 1963 it all ended. Suddenly and completely |
| DISSOLVE to TAPE 1<br>ROLL TAPE SOUND UP<br>(running time 3:50) | NARRATOR (V.O.)<br>In these storied halls, Kennedy had prestige but wielded little power. After his death, his Vice President would push through the legislation Kennedy sought but couldn't obtain. Listen as the law makers of the nation react to the President's death. |

Whether the script is written in the form of coordinated segments with linking narration, or as fully detailed, integrated, dramatic and narrative sequences, the writer must be careful with timing and pacing. The viewer will be prone to lose concentration if the segments are too slow-moving or pompous. It can be equally harmful to the viewer's interest if essential information is fragmented or incomplete. Tight writing, careful timing

and ruthless editing are essential to successful scripting of the drama documentary.

### *The Magazine Format*

Most ITV requirements in instructional design are amenable to the magazine format, which has been successfully used by Children's Television Workshop in its productions of *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*.

*The Characteristics of the Magazine Format.* The magazine format combines elements from almost every type of television production. It can be comprised of complete segments that are mini-dramas, mini-documentaries, animated specials, news broadcasts, or any other unit of production that can be complete in itself. Well named, it is really an audio-visual magazine containing loosely connected or discrete segments of widely varying content and style.

The "binding" or "glue" of the magazine format is also variable. In *Sesame Street* for example, the glue is made up of the street itself together with its regular inhabitants. In many magazine shows, the linking element is supplied by a host or hostess. Sometimes, the glue is created by a series of continuing characters who integrate the show around some loose central theme. In single program magazine shows, the central theme is more

unified than in production. Characteristically, the format can range far and wide for its content, so that unity of theme is not considered nearly as important as in a drama or a documentary.

Scripting an ITV magazine show is usually too much of a task to be undertaken by a single writer. In most cases, a head writer will assign segments to freelancers or to in-house specialists in particular formats. Each segment will be written and produced as a separate entity, sometimes by different production crews in independent studios. It is part of the head writer's task to integrate the segments into a show that is neither fragmented nor loose. The whole will be brought together by a master crew, working with the "glue" talent and rolling in the segments as though they were a part of drama documentary. In magazine shows, the head writer is often more of a manager and a coordinator than a writer, although, as was indicated above, some head writers are responsible for scripting the linking elements of the show.

*Points to Remember When Scripting Magazine Format.* The magazine show offers great flexibility for the writer. Its short segment style makes it easy to maintain the viewer's attention, and no prolonged sustaining of information in the presentation is required.

As a general rule, segments should be self-

contained and on a single topic area with more attention to content than character. They should have some link to the theme of the particular program but must be able to stand alone.

Little time is available for plot development, hence "incident" creation is the basic strategy. In dramatic segments, it is usually necessary to have characters that are readily recognized types. Although clichés should be avoided, adherence to established media and visual literature practices is the safest way to enhance chances of success.

Because continuity is a critical factor, writing the "glue" needs special skills. In some magazine programs, the continuity is almost a teleplay within the show. In such cases, the contributing segments begin to look a little like lengthy commercials. This can sometimes be a useful tactic in presenting the instructional content, but care must be taken to avoid the appearance of "selling" the educational message. "Glue" writers need to understand the style and ambiance of the complete show, and should work closely with the producer/director to keep themselves well-informed concerning the final program content.

Segment writers who produce similar pieces of writing for several programs should aim for development of a quickly recognized style and creation of characters that act in

consistent and "predictably unpredictable" ways. Once these are established, the instructional component will have more available air-time in which to be presented and developed.

The "castor oil sandwich" type of magazine show that intersperses great bits of entertainment with dull bits of instruction should be avoided. Integration and synergy of the instructional and attention-holding aspects of the program is the goal, not the repetitive gaining and losing of attention and interest.

Running gags (the reappearing and rapidly developing segment that reaches its denouement towards the end of the show) are very good vehicles for the instructional content. Well-conceived running gags can carry the viewer through the show while building on the growing knowledge of the educational aspects appearing during the course of the program. Generally, such techniques work best when they end with a teaser that keeps the viewer waiting for the next development.

*Uses of the Magazine Format.* Profitable uses of the magazine format have been found in the presenting of factual material or analyses of current affairs topics. In these cases the format approaches the style of GTV newsmagazine productions like *60 minutes.*

A more advanced use of the ITV format has been developed from Children's Television

Workshop programs and has proven useful in teaching basic skills such as reading, math and writing. This approach may use a central character, animated or real, engaged in an ongoing activity (detectives solving puzzles are the most popular cliché) while animated or dramatized teaching segments are inserted into the story line, or pop into place like commercials. The result can be a fast-paced, breezy, entertaining show with surprisingly high instructional content. The format is less successful when it attempts to develop affective responses, probably because it lacks the time to create and sustain concentration on an in-depth issue.

*Script Format for a Magazine Show.* Magazine shows are created by integrating several different segments, each reflecting the character of its basic format in full-length productions, such as a narrative or dramatic program. Master formats are usually compiled by the head writer and look similar on paper to that of the drama documentary. Writers can obtain formats from a number of agencies, but each will have widely differing characteristics. The outline provided below is illustrative of one used by a number of experienced head writers in master-scripting the show.

FADE IN
INT. MCMAHON'S BARN

DAY
LS.
The animals are ready for another day in McMahon's Barn – the Animal English School. The early morning chores have been done and the animals are sitting down in their stalls waiting for EDWARD DUCK to enter from the barnyard with the daily news. CAMERA PANS to barn door which opens to allow EDWARD to enter. ZOOM to MS EDWARD

EDWARD
Hi gang Big news on the Barn front today. Jack Chicken has just returned from the international vowel contest.

DISSOLVE to LS JACK and JUDGES in auditorium CU JACK.

JACK
(Similar to cock crowing)
oh oh oh ah ah ah ah
oo ooddloo oo ee ee ee
ee u u u

MS 1st JUDGE. SOUND of wild applause

JUDGE 1
(doubtfully)
Is ooddloo a vowel?

MS JUDGE 2

JUDGE 2
No but Jack Chicken is.

CUT to CS EDWARD.

EDWARD
Well, my little chickadees – what do you think. Should Jack win? We'll see later.

CUT to animation sequence 1. Chickens and vowels. Run time 1.60 CUT to MS EDWARD walking through the barn and stopping at WILLIAM HORSE's stall.

EDWARD

Well, William, I guess you and I had better continue our true/false quiz on the English language. Ready? I'll sing yea if you'll say neigh! Let's go.

The format would then proceed in a similar style, moving back and forth from the Barn to the inserted segments. It will probably introduce more featured animals as it develops. The audience may even meet a famous guest star who will provide increased credibility or variety for the show. Eventually, the viewer will discover that Jack Chicken wins the contest.

Magazines are the "specials" of ITV. They are usually costly and quite often are the prestige offering of the station's ITV schedule. The writer who can master the technique of scripting for them will rarely be short of an assignment.

### *The Dramatic Form*

*Characteristics of the Dramatic Form.* Controversy exists in modern ITV programming

concerning the relative merits of two types of drama—the reality drama and the fantasy drama. Reality drama is the dramatic scripting of incidents that are likely to have occurred in the experience of an average individual. They are considered by their supporters to be the fairest, most honest, and most successful way to present dramatized instructional content to the target audience. Writers of reality drama build their scripts around the everyday, real world. They have little to do with dreams and fantasy, and their work always deals with the application of instructional content to a problem occurring in everybody's world.

Fantasy drama, on the other hand, probes the unknown, the unusual and even the impossible. It demands willing suspension of disbelief and plunges viewers into a world of activities and excitement they aren't likely to actually encounter. The fantastic, the bizarre and the outrageous are the staff of fantasy drama. The target audience is invited to receive the content by entering into vicarious experiences of problem-solving in magical situations well beyond the realm of possibility.

Curiously enough, both children and adults react much the same way to either form and seem to learn as much or as little from reality as they do from fantasy scripting. Whatever the reason or reasons, the principles of good

dramatic scripting must apply to both approaches and to all variants of them if the program is to be successful.

The dramatic form in ITV is characteristically similar to most GTV teleplays, and differs only because it is designed to carry a pre-conceived instructional message, rather than to be purely entertaining.

What makes ITV drama the most difficult of all forms of television to write effectively is that it must both deliver its messages and be competitive with GTV's offerings, which are usually much higher budget productions. It will not be accepted by the target group if it falls below expected production standards. Also, it is often hampered as much as assisted by the special conditions under which it has been conceived and produced. In summary, the successful writer of ITV dramas must be able to produce a creative script based upon a realistic and adequately budgeted production level; incorporate the instructional content, research, adapt and change on the basis of utilization reports; and satisfy the consultant.

*Points to Remember When Scripting a Drama.* Writers tackling a dramatic script for ITV need to keep in mind all of the earlier mentioned problems associated with working in an ITV project team.

It is also important the writer be aware of

the axiom that the instructional component cannot be "plugged in" but must be integral to the script. It must be germane to the plot, to the characters and to the ambiance of the program.

Only the writer must write the show. This may be impossible to guarantee in practice, yet the principle should be followed since almost everyone but the writer will attempt to add "content" at the risk of destroying dramatic integrity. If rewrites must be done, the writer should do them, although he or she must be responsible first and foremost for the instructional rigor and objectives of the production.

The cast should be kept small. ITV has low budgets, and, usually, a dearth of talented actors.

Because elaborate set designs almost always cost too much and add little to the show's dramatic impact or instructional success, it is best to keep the sets simple. If substantial money is available, care should be taken not to "overwrite" for big sets and unnecessary or irrelevant effects. Many a fine writer has lost the talent for creative problem-solving when solutions can be bought, rather than thought out.

The writer should also remember that there are critical differences between scripting for television, radio, and the stage. Visuals in television should be able to tell almost

any story better than words. The importance of this factor is discussed in greater detail in the next section but is noted here because it is the distinguishing characteristic of the "telewrite."

Television is *not* radio, nor is it the stage. The camera can explore the minutest detail or cover the widest expanse. The world is open to the telewrites through the strength of the medium's technology. Telewrites can use but do *not* need the full extent of the imagination of their audiences. But if the teleplay excites that imagination, it can scarcely fail to succeed.

*Uses of the Dramatic Format.* The dramatic form can be used for any requirement of ITV, but it best serves those topics which require time for development and which are more than direct information. It is particularly effective when used to present such themes as problem-solving strategies, coping with life problems, examining one's viewpoints and prejudices, and exploring relationships between people from different backgrounds. It is perhaps the best form to deal with affective objectives and it is useful in all types of instructional programs focusing on historical, literary, and dramatic themes.

According to the experienced people interviewed for this manual, writing drama is the most interesting of all scripting tasks. Most

felt it to be the key route to ITV programming that successfully combines the qualities of the medium with the needs of the instructional objectives.

*Script Format for ITV Dramas.* The standard script format used by most agencies is one of the two types described earlier in the manual and, as such, will not be repeated here. The single most important criterion of scripting for the ITV drama is that it conveys its instructional content effectively. Failing to do that, it becomes a script for a GTV production and should be produced in that area.

The final script form for ITV should be chosen for its suitability for reaching the target audience and presenting the content. That decision will be based on the expertise of the project team resource specialists and made with due regard to the budget, available talent, time, and limitations of the production unit or the agency's facilities. Whenever possible the writer should work from his or her areas of strength. Good narrative documentary writers may not possess the tight, concise style necessary for magazine shows. Dramatic script writing may call for a different form of creativity than either documentary or magazine forms. The wise writer will try the various forms but be aware of the writing he or she does best.

## Before The Treatment

### *Knowing the Target Audience.*

The first and most important piece of information required in undertaking an assignment, according to writers interviewed, is a knowledge of the target audience. Writing for the target audience is more defined in ITV than in GTV because in almost all programs —especially those directed to children—the content is coordinated with specific curricula.

Most programs in ITV will have been written to specific objectives based on expected educational needs of the target audience. Consequently, the writer will know roughly the age, sex, and location of the target. If these data are not available, the writer should look to the instructional designer for that information. Without it, the writer and project are already in trouble.

Most programs will fall into definable categories of target audiences as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Target Audience Groupings

| *Group* | *Age* | *Type* |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-school | 0-4 | early childhood |
| K through 3 | 5-8 | children |
| 4 through 6 | 9-12 | children |
| Junior High | 12-14 | youth |
| High School | 15-18 | adolescents |
| College | 19+ | young adults |
| Open Sector | 20+ | adults |

In some agencies, three major groupings are directly noted and form the basis of management divisions. These are usually pre-school, children's and adult.

In whatever way the target audience is grouped, the classifications noted above are clearly inadequate for the writer's need to know for whom the script is to be written. At the very least, answers should be sought for the following questions:

- What is the median age of the target audience?
- How important is age as a factor in the script style?
- What are the limits of the age *range* to be covered by the program?
- Is there a secondary age group such as parents or teachers that must also be attracted by the program?
- What are the known characteristics of the target in terms of psychological development, socio-economic status, sex, educational level, racial composition, religious or ethical principles, geographical distribution, etc.?
- How is the audience to receive the program?
- Are they to be free to leave the viewing room?
- Will their viewing be supervised by a teacher, a parent, or other target audience leader?



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- What previous programs in the content area have been seen by the target audience?
- What known characteristics of the audience directly related to the topic area are available?
- Will there be target audience involvement in the research or consultation provided to the writer?

Almost all of these questions can be answered by various members of the project team, but the instructional designer and the researcher are usually the most fruitful sources of information. Although they may not always have the information on hand, they are normally in contact with educational agencies and should be able to provide data quickly and accurately.

Many writers (and other members of the ITV production team) have a tendency to write for their own immediate families as surrogate target audiences. Although this scripting practice can be useful as a first step, it is no substitute for the detailed and objective information that should be attained from the project team specialists. There is a possibility, too, that the writer's close associates are atypical and much more likely to have difficulty in reviewing the script with objective criticism than would independent readers.

If the project team members are unable to

provide target audience data, the writer must search out the information. This can be done by contacting teachers and parents, or by directly interviewing psychologists, sociologists and other specialists. Information should be sought on the basis of probabilities rather than certainties, and experts should be encouraged to speculate on possible reactions of the target audience to script and production ideas.

### *The Budget*

*Recognizing the Limits of the Budget.* Scripts unproduceable with available funds are the source of desperation for many project teams. The budget is not normally the concern of the writer, but the effect it will have upon the script can be extreme. The ITV writer will usually be working under much tighter financial constraints than his GTV counterpart and will have to share available dollars with other team members. Most ITV agencies, however, have so much of their costs buried in "below the line" accounting that the actual production expenses relating to crews, facilities and equipment are well-covered. The writer would do well to learn how much of the ultimate program or series cost is actually covered this way and exploit that advantage in the scripting.

Other budget information useful to the writer is to learn what levels of above-the-

line funding are available for talent, set design, special effects, location shooting and costuming. The writer should also find out what costs can be met by sources other than direct charges on the project budget; how much funding is available for re-shoots or experimental segment production, and how much free advice, talent, or production activity is available, taking into consideration union or other trade requirements. It is also of use to learn whether there is a policy of limited or ceiling payments that prevents the hiring of particular levels of talent, or the adoption of out-of-state or out-of-country location shooting. Most of this information is usually available from management in most agencies and certainly from the project leader. It is the writer's responsibility to seek them in order to write a viable script within budget limits.

*Writing to the Budget.* Almost all writers of ITV have had to learn to work within tight budgets. Those interviewed for the manual suggested, among other things, the writer be particularly sparing in the use of talent. Actors usually represent a significant cost to the program and low budget productions are particularly vulnerable to run-away talent costs. Many times, an actor can be eliminated by the use of visuals or of symbolic or reality sets to tell the story. It should also be remem-

bered that bad acting will ruin any script. As a general rule it is much better to pay more for good talent, and to write the script around a few skilled actors than it is to hire a larger number of inferior players.

Writers must beware the pitfalls of using non-union or Actor's Guild personnel. The project leader should be aware of potential labor problems but the writer should check them out anyway.

Format must match the available budget. Writing beyond the project's means will only frustrate everyone involved when the script cannot be produced as written. In general, documentaries are the least costly, with dramas somewhere in the middle, and magazine formats the most expensive.

When calling for special effects, the writer must keep in mind these can be extremely costly, especially if they cannot be produced in-house. A writer should get to know the available facilities on the switching boards and in the editing equipment. Sometimes expressive effects can be easily achieved and scripted at low costs. The switchers and editors in production and post-production crews are helpful sources of information on agency production capacities. Optical effects on film are always very expensive.

Creative set design need not be extremely costly, but it should never look cheap or shoddy. Reality sets are usually expensive. On

low budgets, the writer should look to symbolic rather than elaborately realistic sets. Care is essential because it can be upsetting to all, including the target audience, if the set overwhelms or cheapens the production.

Location shooting, especially out-of-town activity, is usually fun but always costly. Writers should avoid scripting location work unless it is absolutely necessary. Having the crew out of the studio uses up valuable dollars, above and below-the-line. If the show is low-budget and the crew and talent is of average quality, the location taping or filming may further reflect the low-production values. Use location works sparingly, or be sure there is sufficient time, talent and money to do it well.

Unnecessary scene changing and/or short sequence shooting should be avoided. Moving sets around or reorganizing production equipment and personnel can cost heavily in time and money. Nevertheless, it is almost axiomatic to write to the limit the budget can bear. No one ever gained praise or awards by consistently writing under budget.

If the budget is too small to fairly write to, the writer must say so and decline the assignment, or start agitating for the project leader to find more dollars. Be aware, however, that it is always possible the necessary dollars will not be found.

Finally, if a budget has not been preset, the

script ought to be written as though money problems did not exist. Writers in this position should be lavish but controlled, expensive but effective, and be able to justify personally and to the team every production demand made in the script. The script may never get produced, but it will be wonderful fun to write.

*Casting Realities*

Probably more ITV writers have gone back to teaching, returned to print or moved into GTV because of the horrible things done to their scripts by inferior talent than from any other cause. There are certain casting realities recognized by experienced ITV writers that are, in fact, key problems in much of the industry. There is a dearth of acting talent outside three or four areas of the United States. New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago are well-supplied with competent actors, few of whom wish to work elsewhere, and even fewer for the relatively low ITV talent fees. Paradoxically, some big-name actors will appear on ITV shows for scale fees, provided the program is well-scripted and the production quality is high. They can, however, create problems over off-air record and audio-visual rights in general.

Another reality is that amateur or semi-pro talent usually does not handle dramatic

production requirements effectively. Television is almost always merciless towards bad acting and the target audience will rarely tolerate poor talent on the screen whether on ITV or GTV. The most serious problems occur in smaller agencies with neither the resources nor the reputation necessary to attract good performers. They must either use the best of local talent or avoid the dramatic format altogether.

The talent problem is considered to be so serious that some ITV writers have suggested that no dramatic format scripts should be written unless the writer is sure appropriate talent is available. Sometimes, of course, there is no real choice and use must be made of whatever actors the agency can provide.

To minimize this sort of problem, the writer should keep the dialogue as tight as possible and use visuals to tell as much of the story as possible.

Since only skilled actors create mood and atmosphere well, the writer can compensate for an amateur's inability to do so by scripting lighting, sound and effects thoroughly to invoke the mood and the atmosphere.

Often an agency will be able to supply one or two good actors who can carry a dramatic script, so writers should avoid scripting for a large cast. While it is not necessary to be afraid to script to the limit of the talent available, writers should know that once the limit

is exceeded the program will probably fail.

Attending script rehearsals in order to re-write the script to the delivery patterns of each member of the cast can be useful in getting the best out of the characters.

Writers should work closely with the talent director to make sure the cast knows the nature of each character in considerable depth. It is important that each member knows not only the character being portrayed, but also the nature of every other dramatic role in the cast.

If it becomes clear the teleplay cannot be acted effectively, a re-write must be done, and should be executed by the original writer. In cases where the script has been underwritten and has not demanded enough from the talent, it should be revised to tap abilities to the limit.

Writers must not necessarily accept the assurance of the talent director or the production crew that the reading of the script and the performances by the actors are adequate. In fact, writers should be most critical while in rehearsals and pre-tapings, because once the actual tapes are accepted, it is too late and criticism is then useless. However, overt criticism of the talent should be left to the director and avoided by the writer.

It is important for writers to maintain as much objectivity as possible when assessing the talent's portrayal of the script. If the

program is in trouble the cause may be weak talent, but it may also be poor scripting. When there is room for doubt, it is often useful to have another writer visit the rehearsals to watch and listen to the action. Candid comments from such observers are often essential for a clear perspective on problems. A head writer may be especially valuable in this role.

If the talent problem is so severe that actors cannot sustain the action, the script should turn toward the drama documentary style. This may help to save the production since less experienced actors are often more comfortable and more acceptable to audiences in short segments.

Writers need to be careful of child actors. They are usually very cute kids in real life and great in rehearsals, but somehow they videotape smaller than life. As a consequence, it is important to get the casting officer to use older kids to play scripted younger parts.

It is essential to see the action as the viewer will see it on the small screen, so the writer should watch rehearsals on the monitor in the control room. What may appear to be adequate talent from the studio floor can be much less effective when shown on the monitor.

In programs other than dramatic formats or in those using shorter dramatic segments, the casting problem is usually not so severe.

Good narrators are usually available from among local TV or radio professionals. But care should still be taken to write narration that is tight, avoids tongue twisters, and relates to, but does not repeat, the content of the visuals.

Finally, when scripting to available talent, writers should never forget the value of sex appeal. Attractive and vital people do have a holding value on every form of television production, including those made for ITV.

## Writing The Treatment

### *Elements of the Treatment*

The treatment is a detailed blueprint for the development of the ITV script. It can be as complete as the writer chooses but should contain a description of characters required for the program, necessary settings and locations, a story-line synopsis, documentary structure, or magazine content in sufficient detail to clearly indicate the program's basic style and content; and the instructional content, strategy or process to be used. It should also include any source information, reference material or back-up data that may help the project team gain a clearer idea of the structure and content of the program and its instructional design.

### *Developing the Treatment*

Every script writer has a different tech-

nique for developing a treatment, but all writers of ITV programs are faced with a common requirement, which both helps and hinders their efforts to produce the treatment. This is the need for the instructional component.

The instructional component provides a definite starting point for a program's content. It may also have substantial impact upon format choice. Some types of content lend themselves best to interviews, others to magazines and/or dramatic presentations. Almost any instructional design can be handled by any format but the ITV writer should lean to that format most likely to best serve the instructional component.

Hindrance occurs when the writer's imagination is hampered by the need to keep content in the forefront of program goals. In many agencies these goals become the bible of the project team, and a treatment that does not pay homage to them will cause serious controversy. Sometimes, however, the instructional component is allowed to overwhelm the script, with sad results for the program's final quality. Nevertheless, careful analysis of the needs of the instructional component is critical. Matching this analysis to the information obtained from the consultants and the researchers should be the starting point for the treatment.

Mere incorporation of the content into a

favorite format, or its presentation as a tacked-on addition to a drama, or as an occasional insert in a magazine program, will rob ITV of its strength and purpose. Although some ITV writers have been able to follow such approaches with some limited success, they are exceptions to the rule. What is required is the development of a treatment that serves the instructional design without laboring under it, and uses the educational content as the basis of the metaphor.

### *In Search of a Metaphor*

All good telewriting calls for creation of a metaphor. Not quite a plot, or a storyline, the metaphor is the element of the program that can be universally understood and remembered by the target audience. It can be as simple as *Roadrunner* cartoons and old westerns where the "good" guys always win out over "bad" guys. It can also be more complex as in *Apocalypse Now*, where the metaphor is probably war itself.

At its lowest level of abstraction in television, the metaphor is a device which carries the plot and presents the characters. In a talk show, the metaphor may be the set design which dominates the screen and creates the style and tone of the interview. In historical programs, it may be a time machine, or a magical movie projector. In any case, a metaphor will always be a "vehicle" for

getting into and about the story, and for achieving the program's objectives.

There are several classic metaphors much used by ITV writers. The "falling asleep before the fire and dreaming" is one hackneyed device for having all sorts of harrowing problems occur without causing the protagonist to suffer the consequences. Another device is the "story teller." The adult or older person relates the story, first in words and then through a transition—usually a pulled focus or slow dissolve—into dramatization. Always, the program returns to the opening scene for the denouement. There are a great many "devices" for carrying the story line and the plot that become metaphors when they are able to add universality to the content by striking a common reaction from the audience that enhances understanding of the messages being sent.

The writers, whose opinions have provided much of the material for this chapter, generally agreed that finding metaphors for ITV was no more difficult than for GTV and offered the following suggestions for new writers. Try to find associations of ideas from the data provided by the instructional designer, researchers, and consultants, then link these associations to the target audience's likes and dislikes in television, literature, drama, etc. This will often produce a match between material and format that will

generate a metaphor. For example, the idea of a "street" for *Sesame Street* is a metaphor that enables the writers to mix adults, children and fantasy characters with a representation of the real world. The street is somehow universal and all of the action of *Sesame Street* can occur within or around it.

In choosing their metaphor, writers should take the key goal of the program, the central element of the instructional design, and a known fact about the target audience, and try to find an idea that is common to each of them. If, for example, the program is one in a series of reality dramas, the idea must stay within the realm of possibility. If it is a fantasy, flights of fancy are necessary. If the format calls for drama documentary, writers should think about how the networks might do it, or merge the idea with a fantasy narrator and have him or her create the metaphor.

Writers can also run through all the known fairy stories, morals and fables, and set them to modern times with the characters confronted by the instructional design. Magazine formats are amenable to this procedure –for both children and adults. For example, a successful O.E.C.A. (TV Ontario, Canada) program, *Citizen Seatbelt*, used a character called "The Fairy Carfather" as a metaphor for reaching children with instructions to wear seat belts.

Perhaps the best advice suggested was that no one could be taught how to find a metaphor, that it had to be sought, played with, refined and, eventually, developed. Once captured, it makes writing a script a relatively simple task.

### *Creating the Treatment*

Once the metaphor has been found, it must be developed into a program outline. Typically this begins by listing and describing the characters. Each description should briefly indicate some aspects of physical appearance but concentrate principally upon psychological characteristics, presenting in detail why the character is in the program and what the role is to be. Next, the sets and locations are listed and described briefly to allow the project team to develop a visual image of them and estimate their cost and construction requirements.

In ITV, some agencies require a listing of instructional content early in the treatment phase. Most writers prefer to leave the listing and its strategy for integration in the program to the last section of the treatment. The instructional designer usually likes to see it appear first of all. In most cases, however, it should lead off the treatment since it is the reason for doing the program in the first place.

The actual storyline of the treatment must be presented in enough detail to clearly show the relationships between format, characterization, setting and instruction so that the team is in no doubt as to the writer's objectives.

Source and reference materials should complete the treatment. Budgets are usually the function of another member of the team and are not usually included in the treatment.

### *Characterization*

There are at least two main schools of thought on characterization. One group believes the storyline should be detailed and the characters created for it. The other approach invents the characters and has their personalities work out the content. In other words, the storyline should emerge from the interaction of their psychology with the problems. Both approaches work out the characterization within the logic of the metaphor. It is critically important to understand much more about the characters than is evident in their written dialogue or characterization will fail. The writer might use a role-playing technique and ask how he or she would, as the character, react to changing circumstances and to one another. Consideration should be given to whether the characters have nonverbal as well as dialogue communication,

what tension exists within and between them, and how these are to be conveyed to the rest of the cast and audience.

In programs other than dramas, the content will lead treatment development and the characters will serve the topic areas rather than become part of the on-going action. For example, in a drama documentary, the actors will play the roles of reality figures and will usually re-create a known outcome. The narrator may be a full-drawn character, but this will be done according to the documentary's content needs in all but a few exceptional cases.

### *Describing the Sets*

Most good treatments provide a list of sets or locations, written in sufficient detail to make it clear that the program's basic visual concepts have been fully developed. In elaborate documentaries or magazine programs, the description should include the nature of the inserts, whether they are animated segments, graphics or dramatic vignettes. In every case, the set description must be complete enough for the production people to estimate costs and to indicate whether the requirements can be met.

### *Writing the Story Outline*

All essential information and interactions

should be included in the story outline. The treatment tells the full program story, but not in scripted dialogue, nor even with every scene included. It will contain the layout for the critical incidents and may present sample or paraphrased dialogue. It will be a complete synopsis of the program's content and should provide the reader with a clear idea of the production's beginning, middle and end.

It should contain sufficient information for the project team to discuss its potential for final scripting, and its ability to carry the instructional content.

Most good writers work hard on treatments because a fully executed treatment is more likely to lead to a well-written and workable script than will a sketchy outline. Poorly developed treatments put great strain on all members of the project team by making it almost impossible for them to judge whether they will be able to incorporate the instructional content effectively. Such treatments also eventually create hardships for the writer who will usually be forced to revise the script repeatedly as a consequence.

Perhaps the best advice that can be offered to the writer is to put more effort into treatment development than into any other phase of the project, for it is the pivot on which the success or failure of the project will turn.

## Writing The Script

### *Thinking and Writing Visually*

One of the most difficult aspects of transition to television from print and radio writing that confronts the beginning ITV writer is conceiving the visual script. Much was written earlier about the importance of understanding production grammar, but that was the mechanics of the trade. The art is a far more creative undertaking that demands visualization of scenes in the absence of words. *All ITV writers should pay particular note to the creation of visual stories.* Writing this portion of the script requires the writer to create a flowing pattern of visual images as they might appear on the television screen. In one sense, this is rather like how it must have been in the old days of silent movies, when dialogue could be used only in print, and most sparingly at that. The visuals had to present almost the whole story. Now the question is one of vital interaction between visual and audio.

Probably too many writers still create scripts that are basically audio-oriented. Making optimal use of the potential offered by the almost unlimited visual range of television is no easy task. None of the experts nor any of the literature consulted for the manual, provided "pat" answers, but there were some good suggestions.

Among them was the advice that writers "day dream" an entire script in visuals from titles to credits. No word must appear at any time either in the sound track or as a graphic, and the script should be conceived entirely on the left side as in a shooting script.

Writers can take a script they have written in the normal manner and re-write it as a visuals-only script. In doing so, they should note places where a visual can reduce the number of words in the narration or the amount of interaction in the dialogue.

Having written the script visually, the writer may add any necessary dialogue to heighten the images or to create continuity, then reduce the words again, this time to sound or music mixes.

It is important to avoid becoming wedded to the visual side, however, and to remember that television should really be called "tele-audiovision." A balance of audio and visual should be sought, not the preponderance of one over the other.

Words take much longer than visuals to present images, but words are likely to carry emotion and inflection much more effectively. Consequently, in scripting for the medium, writers must decide what is most needed to carry the instructional content and choose accordingly.

Visuals should be conceived with the flexibility possible in modern camera optics

through use of the potential of the various shots and movement/shot combinations. Writers should also consider the opportunities offered by zooms, split screens, chroma key and the like and not be restricted by what the human eye can do—it is, after all, only an optical mechanism for bringing images to the brain. By using the flexibility of the medium the writer can create new images for the eye of the learner to see and transmit.

### *A Checklist of Script Writing Ingredients*

For the sake of recapitulation, the following checklist of script writing ingredients is offered for potential new ITV writers:

- Remember the instructional component must be successfully delivered or the project is fruitless.
- Remember the audience sees only what appears on a small screen. Script directions that are not used in the videotape are not seen by audiences. Write the script as though the television screen was the limit and expanse of the world.
- Consult frequently with team members (including the production crew) during creation of the treatment, and carefully assess results of any research conducted on it or on trial segments. Ask for the research to be explained in non-technical language and have the key points recorded.

- Consolidate information and gather last suggestions in a final conference with the project team. In particular, check the instructional design component. Then go somewhere quiet to write the script.

- Find the metaphor and maintain the logic throughout the script. Do not mix metaphors or the program will be confused and disjointed.

- Work from the treatment to develop the first draft.

- No one can instruct on how to write dialogue beyond suggesting that it comes from the characters, not from the writer or from the instructional designer. Therefore, the writer must know the characters better than they know themselves.

- Write tightly and never describe visuals that tell their own story.

- Write the visuals in detail as they are imagined in the program. *Good television writers work from the visual to the audio. Poor writers put pictures to words.*

- Write the script completely before revising any part of it.

- Read the script aloud, playing each character, or working through the narration. Tighten the dialogue.

- Checklist the instructional content. Make sure it's all there, or develop a good argument for its exclusion.
- Read the visuals. Elaborate them or refine them. Try to "see" the show as a silent film based only on the visuals with no printed instructions. Does it work visually? For good television, it must.
- Put the script away for a day.
- Rewrite the draft from beginning to end.
- Check the instructional content to make sure it was not lost in the rewrite.
- Make copies for the project team.

### Writing Revisions

The least loved task of almost all script writers is making the revisions demanded by others. Inevitably, the script will be altered at least a little by everyone who has anything to do with the project. The writer must be responsive to legitimate suggestions and requirements but should guard against writing for the committee.

Points to watch for regarding revisions are:

- Consider, but use only the most relevant of ideas for the dramatic or non-content aspects of the script. If others want to write, let them go ahead, but not on this script. Sometimes an idea from the project team is very good. If so, use it, but only if it fits the metaphor

and maintains the essential logic of the script. Do not permit indiscriminate meddling, and particularly resist ideas based upon ease of execution rather than quality of production.

- Defend the script without being defensive about it. No matter how good a writer is, mistakes will occur once in a while. Listen to logic, and if it is unclear whether the logic exists, get a third opinion. Be open to change that is justified, but avoid writing to please.
- If the instructional quality of the script is challenged, determine whether the criticism concerns delivery or actual treatment of the content. If it is a question of style, argue hard. If content is at issue, concessions will probably be necessary. If argument fails, the researcher should have the script tested on a target group. Remember, the least effective judge of what a target audience will like may be the gatekeeper, yet the gatekeepers select the programs. Try not to compromise on script quality but be ready to rewrite to suit instructional and utilization needs. Be sure the integrity of the program and rigor of the instructional content are not damaged by the changes.
- Rewrite if the talent or the production crew cannot handle the tasks demanded of them.
- Rewrite if the budget cannot stretch to cover the program.

- Rewrite if the research findings are truly compelling, but not if they show only slight "but significant" preferences. Remember that the researcher is just another viewer and the subjects on whom the script is tested are *not* seeing the *actual* program.
- Rewrite quickly on the set when taping is in progress if it becomes clear that the project is in trouble.
- Rewrite if *you* dislike the script, but always get a second opinion—yours might be too demanding.
- Remember, not even writers are possessed of an inside track on truth. Your script may really be inadequate for ITV even if it could win an Emmy in GTV.
- Believe in your own talents as a writer. No one else will if you don't.

*Chapter Seven*

# Conclusion

Every project (including this manual) eventually ends. There comes a time when the writer will see the final version of the program taped, mastered and copied. The credits (which so few viewers notice) will feature a list of contributors, chief among whom will be the director, the talent, and the project leader. Somewhere, the writer will appear along with the researcher and the instructional designer. As far as the world of target audiences is concerned, it is the producer/director's program. Only the person who created the characters, imagined the sets, integrated the content and invented the metaphor, knows for an absolute certainty that, for good or bad, the program really is

the writer's. Not only that, but the truly talented and honest writer will admit (when pressed) that the script never really did get produced as well as it was written!

## Ten Selected Readings


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